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MIRACLES

PAPERS & SERMONS

BY

W. LOCK W. SANDAY

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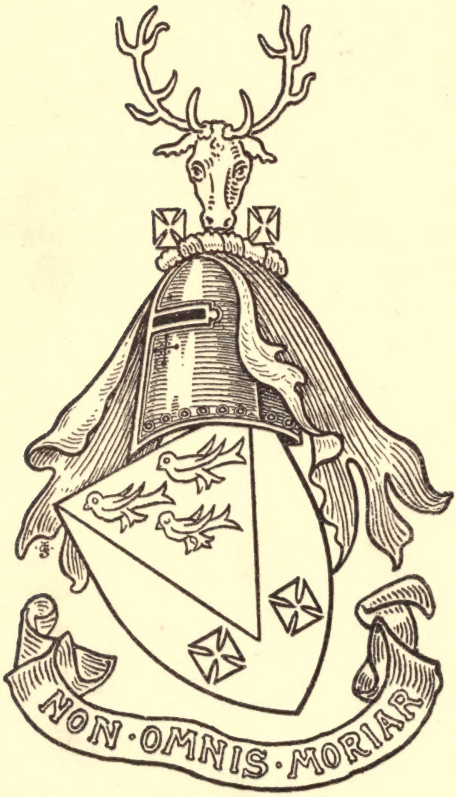

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Bertram C. A. Windle,

LL.D., D.Sc., K.S.G., F.R.S.

were themselves actors in the events recorded or at least acquainted with the actors. We must indeed bear in mind that the narratives have been passed on to us at first orally, and that as we now have them they have undergone the embellishment which always comes to oral traditions. Nevertheless they are an independent testimony, and because they are such we must not lightly put aside as unauthentic any of these stories simply because they are not corroborated by other legends or documents."

The volume is issued in the charming cover designed by Mr. Paul Woodroffe, and is in every way an attractive volume.

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Miracles * is the title of a volume of sermons and essays by various authors which has been called forth by the publication of Mr. Thompson's book called *Miracles in the New Testament.* They represent the view of Anglican orthodoxy and have the defects of the limitations imposed on such apologists by their attitude towards all post-Apostolic instances of the miraculous. Mr. Thompson holds what is now called belief in the supernatural without belief in miracle—our old acquaintance "non-miraculous Christianity" under a new name. He divides the miracles of the New Testament into two groups —those which were not miracles because they can be explained by "natural laws," and those which could not have happened because miracles do not happen. On these points we should like to make two remarks. First, Mr. Thompson and his school seem to have a most extraordinary idea as to what "natural laws" are and as to the finality of our knowledge about them. Take the questions of "suggestion" and of "faith healing" which—as they hold—account for the miracles

MIRACLES

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PAPERS AND SERMONS

CONTRIBUTED TO THE *GUARDIAN*

BY

W. LOCK, D.D., W. SANDAY, D.D.
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WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY

H. S. HOLLAND, D.D.

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PREFACE

It will be seen at a glance that the papers and sermons put together in this volume are purely occasional. They merely record a single episode in a familiar and prolonged controversy.

Mr. Thompson's book made a very definite claim that the full and real belief in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ would gain by the total elimination from His life on earth of all that went beyond the limits of ordinary human life as we know it. This elimination was meant to apply to the Resurrection from the Dead. In support of his position, he sought to show that the evidence for the miracles in the Gospel records collapsed under critical scrutiny. It was the claim to hold a full belief under these conditions, which gave any special character to the critical examination of the records, and it was this which led to the keen discussion which followed. A great deal was written on both sides. The materials here presented represent a certain sequence of statements that were made mainly at the invitation of the Editor of *The Guardian* for use in his paper. They were written without concert on the individual responsibility of each separate author. They obviously make no

pretence to completeness of treatment: they are only connected by the unity of the common theme. Such as they are, they may serve to illustrate the lines on which thought is moving in the mind of those to whom the method and outlook of the book in question appear radically inadequate. Their justification will lie in the further and fuller consideration of the vital issue at stake which they may help to evoke.

H. S. HOLLAND.

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MIRACLES

THE MEANING OF MIRACLE

A Sermon preached before the University of Cambridge by the Rev. W. SANDAY, D.D., *Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford.*

"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended [or made to stumble] in Me."—ST. MATT. xi. 6.

I OUGHT perhaps to preface what I have to say with a few words of explanation. There may be noticed a certain resemblance, which amounts in one case to rather marked coincidence, with a book entitled *Miracles in the New Testament*, which proceeds from my own University, and which has appeared within the last few days. It is true that the book and the sermon are not wholly unconnected; but at the time when the sermon was written I had seen nothing more than the publisher's advertisement, and I have thought it best to leave the text of my discourse as it was written. When this is finished I will return to the subject of the book, and I will endeavour to indicate, as briefly as I can, the main points of difference between the two positions.

I am afraid it is true that among the serious discussions of the present day there is, even now, though debate is open, and though it has been proceeding so long, still lingering about us not a little simple misunderstanding and playing at cross purposes. And this is partly due to one of the growing virtues of our time—its uncompromising sincerity. Men will not, at whatever cost, shelter themselves behind what appears to be at all of the nature of a *double entendre*. Sooner than do this, they will exaggerate the statement they wish to enforce; they will leave its sharp edges standing, and not attempt to file them down; they will allow it to seem more opposed to traditional teaching than it really is. It is only natural that this should be specially characteristic of the younger generation. Whatever its faults, it has at least no lack of courage. The youthful champion is always ready to ride out in advance of the host and challenge the adversary, if it be but with a sling and a stone. We perhaps think that it would be better for him to stay in the ranks; and that may quite well be true. But we must take things as we find them, and be glad to admire the qualities that we see without being too insistent upon those that we do not see. It is in this way that there has grown up of late a class or type of opinion which would express its views in the concise formula, that it believes in the supernatural, but it does not believe in miracle; it is the present-day

form of the old watchword of a "non-miraculous Christianity."

I do not think that I am really disturbed by this. We have seen examples of that type of opinion before; and so much good honey has come from that hive that I do not think we need be too critical. Here in Cambridge especially I need not mention names, though one illustrious name [1] is before my mind, a theologian of whom, if of any, it may be said that his—

> "High-piled books, in charact'ry
> Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain."

And yet I cannot help thinking that the formula is, after all, too clear-cut and too concise. I doubt if it really does justice to those who hold it. The first half of their confession of faith is, indeed, of immense value—especially in view of the quarter from which it comes. It comes from those who aim at being, and who are, thoroughly modern. They are this, and yet they claim to be in the full sense Christian. And I for one would willingly allow the claim, because the essence of Christianity is an intense belief in the presence and power of God. And if that is what they mean by belief in the supernatural, then I think that they have the root and heart of the matter, in comparison with which everything else is unimportant. I will go further, and I will say that in any case, whether they accept in word miracle or not, they have the essence of

[1] Dr. E. A. Abbott, Senior Classic, 1861.

the idea of miracle. Because miracle is not, and never has been even in the earliest ages, an end in itself; it has always, all down the ages, been regarded as just this very thing of which we are speaking—a proof or sign of the presence and the power of God. Those, therefore, who in the events of history see and grasp that presence and that power arrive at the end which the Christian has in view, even though they do so without the logical interposition of miracle.

For this reason I would not contend with them beyond a certain point if, when all has been said, they still adhere to the second, negative, half of their confession, and still insist upon denying the reality of miracle. But the question I would wish to put to them and to invite them to consider is, Are they really called upon to deny the reality of miracle and to banish the word from their beliefs? They can only do so at the cost of raising a barrier between themselves and great numbers of their fellow-Christians, and at least seeming to make a serious inroad on much that Christendom holds sacred. Are they really compelled to do this? Before they decide that they are, I submit that they should at least examine themselves closely, and determine exactly what they mean. For I conceive that it is largely a question of definition. It is possible, and of course easy, to define miracle in such a way that the thinking man of to-day is almost compelled to deny it. I should do so myself.

But then I think I can show that we are under no necessity to adopt this definition, and that, if we do adopt it, we are at once led into acts of violence towards the historical evidence which are not justified.

For, to begin with, nothing can be more certain than that the Apostles and their contemporaries believed themselves to be living in the midst of miracles, or that many of them were convinced that they had wrought miracles themselves. This is absolutely clear from the language of St. Paul. Speaking of himself he says: "In nothing was I behind the very chiefest Apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works"—the three regular words for miracle (2 Cor. xii. 11, 12).

In this passage St. Paul not only claims for himself the working of miracles, but he assumes that others were in the habit of working them—in fact, that the power to do this was part of the regular credentials of an Apostle. And you will be well aware that that passage is only one among a number which make the same claim and imply the same assumption. In truth, the force of evidence could not go further. We have a writer, who is certainly an honest man, setting down his own experience—his experience both of things that he had done himself and of things that he had seen with his own eyes. And it is not as if he were asserting

for the first time something that his readers could not test; he is not making any fresh assertion at all, but only appealing to notorious facts. To reject evidence of this kind would be a stronger measure than to reject miracle. The witness of St. Paul is no doubt the best that we have. That of the rest of the New Testament is not quite so immediate. But at the same time the evidence of the Gospels and Acts is exceedingly strong. In the later chapters of the Acts the writer describes a number of events at which he was present himself. And in the case of the Gospels there is a remarkable concurrence of testimony, for the belief in miracle is implied more or less in every document that criticism can distinguish. If, then, by "miracle" we mean a certain series of historical events, the evidence for it is overwhelming. And, without going further, that is surely in itself a perfectly tenable sense to attach to the word, and, so long as we keep to that sense, miracles must without doubt be affirmed and not denied.

But this is only the threshold of the subject. We can go some way further. The following is the definition of Miracle in the great *New English Dictionary*: "A marvellous event occurring within human experience which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being; chiefly an act (for instance, of

healing) exhibiting control over the laws of Nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either Divine or is specially favoured by God." That is at least a very good definition of Miracle, though it is perhaps not quite ideal. My only doubt about it would be whether it does not enter a little too much into detail, and so perhaps impose restrictions which are not necessarily inherent in the word. The object in view has no doubt been clearness; and that object is, I think we may say, attained. For my own part I should not wish to press the objection. There is nothing in the definition as I read it that personally I could not accept. It is in the nature of definition to be absolute. And therefore, when we read of an "event which cannot have been brought about by human power, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity," we need not beg the question quite so far as this; it would be enough if we were to assume that the miracle, so far as it is a miracle, at least suggests Divine action and Divine intervention. I do not see that those who expressly affirm their belief in the supernatural can rightly take exception to this. If we really believe in the supernatural, it is reasonable to believe in degrees of the supernatural. Whatever may be the case in the absolute nature of things, to our human apprehension at least God is more manifestly present in some events than in others. It is a way of speaking perhaps, but one that falls in with our broad

conception of the manner of Divine action and operation. So that, whatever scruples may be entertained as to the precise nature of miracle, I cannot see that objection can lie against the general view that some acts and some events suggest Divine influence or intervention (as we call it) more than others. But if that is the sense which we give to miracle, I fail to understand why even a conscience that is scrupulously modern should be so shy of the word.

The truth is, I strongly suspect that those who describe themselves as rejecting miracle without rejecting the supernatural read into the word "miracle" a sense that does not properly belong to it and is far better kept out. They treat miracle as though it meant, not only something above Nature —that is, above the course of ordinary Nature— but something contrary to Nature, something that directly contravenes natural law. Not even the ancients, whose acquaintance with the order of Nature came so far short of ours, not even they committed themselves to this extreme position. Are there not those golden words of St. Augustine's ? —"How can that be contrary to Nature which takes place by the Will of God, seeing that the Will of the Almighty Creator is the true nature of every created thing ? So that miracle is not contrary to Nature, but only to what is known of Nature." St. Augustine, with awestruck mind, looked out into the universe and saw it full of Deity. He saw

the Divine Will everywhere at work. He saw the world from end to end instinct with a wonderful order. And ought not we, too, to see the same vision? Ought not we, too, to see the Divine wisdom reaching from one end to the other mightily and sweetly ordering all things? Within the range of this vast order there are some things more difficult than others, some things more exceptional and unique, but the same Divine breath breathes through them. I confess that the movement which tends as it were to merge miracles in the supernatural—in other words, to lay stress upon the Divine cause rather than upon the exceptional mode—seems to me entirely wholesome and to be welcomed, so long as it keeps within the bounds of Christian reverence and humility, and does not become too free with its negations.

Let us take a broad view, first of that which we call the Apostolic age, and then of the life and ministry of our Lord. Certainly St. Paul lived, as we have seen, in an atmosphere of miracle. He had all round him, and he practised himself, those remarkable spiritual gifts, which included gifts of healing and discerning of spirits, and speaking with tongues and interpretation of tongues. He called these things miracles, and when we, too, call them miracles, we are only repeating the language that we have inherited from him. It is more edifying to us in the twentieth century to dwell upon the more excellent gifts of faith and hope and charity, and

upon that special gift of insight which enabled him to penetrate into the deep things of God. There are doubtless diversities of gifts; some are higher and some are lower, but it is the same Divine Spirit which operates in all.

In like manner, when we turn to the ministry of our Lord. It was the universal view of the Primitive Church that God had anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power; that He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him (Acts x. 38). And we cannot doubt that our Lord Himself described His own work in the same way—"If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Matt. xii. 28); "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. . . . And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades: for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day" (Matt. xi. 21, 23). These "mighty works" (δυνάμεις) are the original and equivalent of our own word "miracles." How, then, can we give up either the word or the idea? I cannot think that we are in the least called upon to give it up, unless it is in deference to a false connotation that we import into our definition.

I do not suppose that even the greatest purist would wish that either the word or the broad idea should be given up by the simple Christian. But then there comes in this insatiable curiosity of ours ; it is not content with a broad idea, but it insists on knowing the How and the Why. It draws a distinction between the easier miracles and the more difficult ; it accepts the one and it rejects the other. And then it goes on a step further. It lifts up its eyes to the Person of our Lord, and certain aspects of that Person it classes among the more difficult miracles. It accepts the principle of a Divine Incarnation ; it admits the supernatural ; but it challenges certain points in the alleged manner of the Incarnation—more particularly the miraculous beginning and the miraculous ending, the Virgin Birth and the narratives of the Resurrection and Ascension. We have reached a stage in the history of criticism at which we must face this challenge.

Perhaps I should begin by saying that I believe there is a tendency to underestimate considerably the strength of the historical evidence in both these cases. The critic is apt to follow the example of the man in the street, and as soon as he comes to anything that seems to him abnormal, to treat it at once as a fatal objection and to reject it without further parley. Now, whatever the lecturer in Victoria Park may do, the Christian scholar and theologian cannot do this. It is possible that at the end he may not arrive at a thoroughly clear-cut

dogmatic conclusion. But he will at least try to weigh all the facts and to take account of all the considerations that should affect his judgment.

Let us try to sketch the conditions as briefly as we can. It is understood that the claim to a supernatural birth formed no part of the public preaching of our Lord. During His lifetime He passed for the son of Joseph and Mary. The Gospels, including the Fourth, use quite freely the language by which this is implied. That is in itself an excellent indication of their early date and generally authentic character. It was not through any public teaching at all that the belief in the Virgin Birth spread among Christians. Two reports have come down to us, which are evidently quite independent, but which in a strange way supplement each other. Both must have come through private channels and bear upon their face the character of private confidences; but whereas St. Matthew's version points ultimately to Joseph—and we may remark in passing that the systematic way in which the narrative is brought back to him is an argument against the view to which Harnack has lately given expression that the first and second chapters of this Gospel have a different origin—whereas in the First Gospel the ultimate source of the narrative seems to be referred to Joseph, the corresponding portion of the Third Gospel seems to be no less distinctly traced up to Mary. Of course this is a very old observation, but still the peculiar relation implied is in itself

remarkable. And, wide apart as the two Gospels are in their selection of incidents, just on the most important points they are closely agreed. And I may refer again to Harnack's latest work, with other converging evidence, as going to show how one by one the various hypotheses which have been put forward to account for the introduction of the Virgin Birth are being laid aside. It is practically no longer held to be a product of the verse in Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin [or damsel] shall conceive and bear a son;" we can well understand that, when once the belief in the Virgin Birth was started, this verse would soon be brought in to illustrate and confirm it, but by itself it would not have been enough to give rise to an opinion which Jewish thought did not require. Still less can it be supposed that this most Jewish of the Gospels drew the idea from Gentile sources—such as Soltau's discovery that the story of the Magi was suggested by the journey across Asia Minor of Tiridates and his following to do homage to Nero in the year 66. There again it is not difficult to understand the story as attaching itself to a foundation—perhaps a slight foundation—of fact; but it is another thing to base it entirely upon such an episode.

The Matthæan story is still essentially Jewish, and therefore early; the new-born Babe "will save His people [*i.e.* the Chosen People, Israel] from their sins." It is not easy to think of this as penned for the first time after the great influx of the Gentiles

through the missionary labours of St. Paul and after the virtual rejection of the Gospel by the Jews. But if that is true of the opening chapters of St. Matthew, it is still more true of the opening chapters of St. Luke. It is by this time coming to be generally recognised that there is nothing more intensely and primitively Jewish in the whole New Testament than these two chapters. Need I do more than point to the prophecy which greets the birth of the young Child ?—" He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High ; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David ; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end " (Luke i. 32, 33), or to the familiar words of the *Benedictus*, " He hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David. . . . Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us ; to show mercy towards our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant ; the oath which He sware unto Abraham our father, to grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him without fear " (i. 69, 71–74). Besides all this strong particularism, there are in the chapters a number of rather recondite and antiquarian touches on matters of Jewish custom and ritual, which evidently do not come from St. Luke, but must be derived from his source. I would not myself deny that the imagination has been at work somewhat freely in these opening sections of both the First

and Third Gospels; it would be precarious to lay any great stress on more than the points that the two authorities have in common—the birth at Bethlehem, the birth before conjugal union, the Name Jesus, the home at Nazareth. But on these common points the weight of coincidence is strong. I myself believe that St. Luke has indicated with great exactness the nature of the circle in which Christ was born, and which was prepared for His birth by its eager expectation of the Messiah. The subordinate figures—Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna—contribute to this effect as much as the principal. And then we cannot forget, when at last this very private material was brought out to light and published, with what rapidity it made its way throughout Christendom, so that it is already firmly established in the Letters of Ignatius, in Aristides, and in the oldest form of the Apostles', or Roman, Creed. And this fixed place, once gained, has never been lost. It would be too much to say that considerations such as these guarantee all the details that have come down to us; but I believe that they do point back to a nucleus or original kernel of fact in harmony with the conceptions of the time which has entered, and was designed by God to enter, into the providential order of history.

In the case of the Virgin Birth it is not quite hopeless to summarise the salient points in a concise form. But this can hardly be done with regard to the

intricate problem of the Resurrection. The records that we possess might be said to reflect the excitement and confusion of those early days. They represent several distinct lines of tradition which have not been harmonised, and which it is difficult to reduce to a regular order and sequence. In some ways the very want of order and symmetry is an advantage, as showing the natural state in which the tradition has reached us. In any case the beginnings of this tradition are extremely early. There is practically no doubt that the belief in the Resurrection dates from the days and weeks immediately following the Crucifixion. It was the one thing which held the infant Church together, which inspired it with new hope and force, and which launched it upon its career of conquest. Practically this is agreed upon all hands—among those who call themselves Christians—by the new school whose watchword is "the supernatural without miracle" as well as by others. They, too, would emphasise both the strength and the vast significance of the belief no less than their fellows. The difference is not as to the fact of the living Christ, but only as to the mode or nature of His revival. There cannot be any question that it was in Jewish circles that the belief in the Resurrection first sprang up. The Gentile world had in the first instance nothing to do with it; the Gentile converts simply took over the belief from their Jewish teachers—and first and foremost among them from St. Paul. But among

the Jews the characteristic form of the belief in a life after death, or (as they expressed it) "life from the dead," was the Pharisaic doctrine of a bodily resurrection. This was the form of the belief which the first disciples had in their minds, and which naturally and inevitably shaped and coloured all their experiences. This was pre-eminently so with St. Paul, who before his conversion had been a zealous Pharisee. He is represented to us in the Acts as boldly avowing the fact: "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts xxiii. 6). So it was in the last resort this Pharisaic doctrine that was taken over by the Christian Church, and that from the first dictated the form of the Christian conception. It could not be otherwise. It was the one alternative open to those who believed in life from the dead at all. In that mould the belief of the first disciples was cast, and it has remained dominant in the Church down to our own time.

Down to our own time it may be said broadly that no one has tried, or thought of trying, to go behind this form of the belief. But I do not think that we can be surprised if, more especially in the younger generation, attempts are being made to go behind it. And I for one do not feel that I can condemn those attempts. I do not think that we are called upon to regard the precise form of the Pharisaic doctrine as the last word on the subject.

It is not in itself a Divine revelation, but only the relative expression or outward clothing of a Divine revelation. At the same time it is never an easy thing to distinguish between what is transitory and what is permanent in religion. And I would invite those who feel themselves moved to embark on these experiments especially to give full weight to the fact that it was through the medium of minds possessed and dominated by these ideas, and, indeed, practically not conscious of the existence of any other, that the first announcement that Christ was alive and not dead was given to the world. The questions that agitate us did not trouble them. We must beware of reading back into their thoughts and their experiences ideas that were altogether alien to them. Least of all must we forget this, when we ask ourselves that last and most difficult of questions, what it was that actually happened, or, more strictly, how we at this present day should describe what actually happened. I have said that I welcomed, as we must all welcome, the first half of the confession of faith of those of whom I am speaking, their frank recognition of the supernatural. We know what they mean by that, and we applaud the confession of it. We hope that they will hold fast to it, and put it in the forefront of their teaching, and not merely keep it in the background.

I said at the outset that, as I apprehend the acceptance of miracle, I do not feel that I am called upon to affirm anything really contrary to Nature.

When I say that I am not laying down a condition to be applied in a peremptory way as a measure of what is historical and what is not. I would, indeed, specially deprecate that kind of application. We too often see the unfortunate results of offhand pronouncements as to what is to be regarded as credible or incredible. These anticipations of laborious and patient inquiry cramp and narrow the whole process. They, as it were, close up the pores of the mind just where they should be kept most open. In that most delicate question as to the exact proportions of historicity in events long past, and that happened under exceptional and heightened conditions as compared with our present experience—in this quest of ultimate realities we walk by faith and not by sight. We have an assured faith that in the end the higher and highest laws of Nature will not be contravened. But we hold this faith with the humility of those who are true at once to science and to religion. We hold it subject to the spirit of that great doxology to which all our searchings should lead. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen."

I have preached what I had written—and substantially as it was written—before I had seen the book of which I spoke at the outset. I have now read the most pertinent parts of this, and I will try to summarise the points in which the views which I have expressed and those in the book differ. The first question that we naturally asked ourselves is, Are there traces of that misunderstanding or ambiguity of language which seemed to me to be answerable for much of the difference of opinion that we find existing? I think there are such traces. The line I have taken is that we are not compelled to think of miracle as involving anything really contrary to Nature. I am quite prepared to say that, broadly speaking, the course of Nature is uniform; that it rests upon general laws; and that where these laws appear to be neutralised or suspended, it is only in the way in which in our common experience we see the intervention of some higher agency or higher law neutralise or suspend the operation of a lower agency or lower law—just as, for instance, the act of catching a ball neutralises and apparently suspends the action of gravitation. I do not for myself wish to claim more than this, and I presume that the author of the book would admit as much as this. He strongly affirms his belief in the supernatural, and I do not think that he would object to any well-attested action of the supernatural that was consistent with natural law, known or unknown. But then he constantly writes

as though miracle did mean something more than this. He does not seem able to get out of his mind the presumption that miracle involves something contrary to Nature. He writes: "The believer in miracles makes the double mistake of looking for God, not in the normal event, but in the abnormal, and not in the agency, but in the act. We can only meet this error by insisting that natural laws are the normal rule of God's working, and natural events (not miracles) the ordinary form of His acts." I could myself subscribe in principle to this. But the use of the word "abnormal" seems to me to beg the question. And I observe that the word "ordinary" appears to be used as though it were equivalent to "in the order of Nature." No allowance seems to be made—and throughout the book I believe that no sufficient allowance is made—for the possibility of things that are extraordinary or exceptional, and yet are within the order of Nature. It is no doubt true that this requirement that in the last resort things must be within the order of Nature is one great difference—though, as we have seen in the case of St. Augustine, not a universal difference—between ancient thought and modern. And the apparent neglect of this condition is the chief cause of the reserve and misgiving with which we are apt to regard ancient descriptions of the miraculous. For myself I should allow that an element of doubt comes in on this ground. And I should be prepared to put in here

and there notes of interrogation on the strength of this. But the author of whom I am speaking is not content with such measures. His methods are more peremptory, and his verdicts are more sweeping. For him either a story is true or it is untrue. There hardly seems to be any mean. I can well believe that this is largely a way of writing, and that with a little self-examination he would express himself more guardedly. But he is in the habit of using uncompromising language. For instance, in such sentences as these : "Either these events are miracles, or they never happened. The upshot of our inquiry is that they never happened." Or, again, "Yet the complete mediation of God by man is the essence of the Christian Incarnation. And it is only by the rejection of miracles that this doctrine can come to its full rights." "The rejection of miracles involves the rejection of a distinctive part of the teaching of the Fourth Gospel." I am well aware that this trenchant style and these clear-cut issues, which are characteristic of the whole book, will be a recommendation to many readers. They fall in with the demand that one so often hears for "a plain Yes or a plain No." I respect that demand because it is made in sheer honesty ; and I am not sorry that a book should have been written which seems expressly made to meet it. The motive behind the whole book is a most transparent sincerity, to which, in itself, I would do all honour. But at the same

time I am sure that there are a great many questions that cannot be answered, and that ought not to be answered, by a plain Yes or a plain No. I believe that this question of miracles is one of them. Along with this peremptory method there goes an uncompromising modernism. The writer assumes absolutely the point of view of the modern man, and no other. There is but a single step in his argument between the ancient narrative and its modern acceptance or rejection. This certainly simplifies the issues, but it seems to me that it unduly simplifies them. I would submit that all inquiries of this kind should really be in two steps —the first to decide what the ancients themselves really thought, and not until that has been settled to decide further what we moderns should think. It is very largely a matter of translation out of the context of ancient ideas into the context of modern ideas. It is here that we are apt to be brought up against our limitations. There are, doubtless, some cases, and perhaps not a few cases, in which a full and complete translation is impossible. But that is just the main problem before us at the present day. If we each try to do all in our power to improve a little upon what has gone before, we shall arrive nearer and nearer to the truth—that is, to that which is true for us—by degrees.

And that brings me to a last condition which I would venture to urge. The writer of whom I have been speaking passes, as I have said, at one bound

from the ancient narrative to the modern interpretation. He drops out all that comes between. That means that he does not consider the Creeds. Once more, I would not complain of him for this; because the world at large (as distinct from the Church) also does not consider the Creeds, and it is right that it should be met upon its own ground. It is right that even a sincere Christian should from time to time put himself upon its ground. But he will not be content to do this as a permanent attitude. Sooner or later he will have to come to terms with the Creeds, and to know exactly where he stands in regard to them. Now the great function of the Creeds, if I am not mistaken, is to serve as a connecting link or links between the past and the present. The Christian religion is a continuous process, and it has had a continuous history; and the Creeds bind together the beginnings of that process with the end. They represent the principle of identity which runs through all the flux of change. And yet even the Creeds, standing as they do for this principle of identity, are not themselves absolutely exempt from change. They must mean at one time something not quite the same as that which they meant at another—centuries before. They have to be adjusted to different conditions, to a different context of ideas. At the same time it is their part to emphasise the identity and unity. They throw us back upon the search for identity and unity. They warn us not to dwell too much

on that in which the present differs from the past. They compel us to think of that in which present and past are one. Can we expect to make both ends absolutely meet? Is there to be no margin that we are obliged to leave open? Is there to be no element of mystery, in which we must needs acquiesce as mystery, until we know even as we are known? If that were so, the field of religious belief would be different from all the rest of human life; it would have less in it of mystery just at the point where we should expect that it would have more. In short, it would approximate more and more to that type which the poet described as—

> "A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
> An intellectual All-in-all!"

I do not think that that is exactly the type that most Christians would wish to aspire to; and I do not think that they are under any obligation to aspire to it.

THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF THE GOSPELS IN RELATION TO MIRACLES

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The acceptance of the miraculous will never be decided in the last resort by literary considerations. Behind all questions of the evidence for any particular miracle will lie the problem of the possibility of miracle, a problem which runs up into philosophical speculation and of which the solution depends upon the way in which our minds conceive of the universe. Do we picture to ourselves a mechanical uniformity of Nature which admits of no change? or a living unity in which the higher elements are always moulding the lower to new issues, in which the human will, and therefore, *a fortiori*, the Divine Will, can produce fresh results, results which go beyond and, in a certain sense, against anything which Nature, apart from the particular action of that particular Will, could at that particular time have produced?[1] Such considerations will always

[1] For an excellent statement of the power of the human will "involving a control and in important respects a subversion of what were Nature's methods of dealing with life," compare the Romanes Lecture for 1905, pp. 20–24. "Man is Nature's rebel. When Nature says 'Die,' Man says 'will live.'"

affect our attitude towards the evidence. Yet literary considerations have their rights and must have their say; it is they which decide the literary quality and value of the documents with which we deal; it is they which compare, and sift, and appraise the evidence of the witnesses, and from this literary side two lines of argument have of late years gained fresh strength and have been used to reinforce the attack upon the Gospel miracles, and it is the object of this paper to attempt to estimate their real value.

I. The first of these arises from the close and exact analysis of the Synoptic Gospels which has been carried out in the last twenty years in Germany and in England, the results of which are best embodied for English readers in the recent volume *Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, edited by Dr. Sanday, or the careful essay by Mr. H. L. Jackson in the "Cambridge Biblical Essays." The result of this analysis is to make it extremely probable that the history of the documents which attest our Lord's life was of this kind. At a fairly early date a collection was made of the Lord's great sayings and discourses, with some slight narrative of the circumstances out of which they grew prefixed to them. This can be reconstructed, with more or less probability, out of the material common to St. Matthew and St. Luke, and has been christened "Q" (*Quelle*, the original source). Later a need was felt of some narrative of the Lord's ministry.

This was first supplied in St. Mark's Gospel, written, with some few exceptions, in the form in which we now have it, the writer probably having a knowledge of Q, but using it very little because he was only intending to supplement it, and therefore supposes that his readers will know all that was in Q. A little later St. Matthew and St. Luke aimed at a completer narrative still, which should go behind the ministry to the Birth, and should represent the Gospel for different classes of readers. For this purpose each used both Q and St. Mark, following St. Mark's outline, and in the main his actual words, incorporating the discourses from Q, and adding materials from other sources. Later still the writer of the Fourth Gospel, having a knowledge of the Synoptic Gospels, wrote his Gospel, wishing to supplement and perhaps in some respects to correct them.

But, further, it is pointed out that the miraculous element increases in proportion to the lateness of the document; Q, whether as reconstructed by Mr. Allen or by Sir John Hawkins, contained one allusion to a group of miracles (St. Matt. xi. 5 = St. Luke vii. 22), and, as reconstructed by Sir John Hawkins, an account of two miracles of healing. St. Mark adds some of the most marvellous of the miracles, but recognises fully the limitations of the Lord's power and knowledge. St. Matthew and St. Luke add the miracles connected with the Birth and Infancy, soften phrases which emphasised

the human limitations of the Lord, and heighten the Divine effect; while finally, in St. John, the Divine element is more prominent still: the narrative circles round a group of seven miracles, and the symbolic and evidential significance of the miracles as manifesting the Lord's glory is emphasised. Such changes seem more significant when seen to be more or less deliberate on the part of the later writers, modifying the text of documents which lay before them, and, in the face of these changes, it is urged that the writers move further and further from the kernel of historical fact into the realm of legend.

The fact of such changes cannot, indeed, be denied, but its extent may be, and generally is, exaggerated; for at the one end of the series, in Q, the element of the miraculous, including an allusion to the raising of the dead, is already present; and at the other end the miraculous element in the Fourth Gospel never obscures the truly human nature of Him Who sat wearied by Jacob's well and wept at the grave of Lazarus; and how human, how different from the story in the Apocryphal Gospels, is the story of the Crucifixion in all the four Evangelists! Moreover, the fact is itself patient of two quite opposite interpretations—either each fresh writer is moving further away from historic fact into the sphere of embellishment, legend, mythology, or he is moving from the external to the internal, getting at each step nearer to the heart of the matter, giving

a truer representation of what the Lord had really been. Every biographer has to stand this test; from the moment that he first seizes an interpretative clue which explains his hero's motives, he is liable to the charge that he is so moulding his narrative as to make it illustrate his interpretation, whereas all the while he has the right clue in his hands, and is explaining the actions of the hero's life far more truly than could have been done by a photographic annalist.

We claim with some confidence that this is true of our Evangelists. For, in the first place, it is clear that the primary motive of the changes in the documents is not to alter the tone of the narrative, but to advance from incompleteness to a greater completeness. Q is essentially only a selection of discourses, and therefore cannot be used to discredit a narrative of events, any more than a collection of a preacher's sermons could discredit a subsequent account of the facts of his life. It had almost certainly no account of the Crucifixion, yet its silence does not discredit the truth of that. But Q was soon felt to be inadequate; it was not enough to know what Jesus had taught; He must be known as acting, as having substantiated His teaching, as having affected men's lives by deed as well as by word, and so an account of the ministry was framed. Then the whole life from the Birth onwards was given; while finally the Divine source of the power was revealed, but revealed as embodied in action.

The Gospels are (it has been said) "anchors in the actual that have saved Christianity from all kinds of intellectual, spiritual, and ecclesiastical perils."

Again, it needs to be remembered that with all that has been done for the study of the Gospels we do not really know even yet the exact purpose for which some of them were written, much less the exact historic circumstance which called them forth. The one thing which is quite clear is that none of them was meant to be a "biography" in the full modern sense of the word. St. Luke is the only writer who sets himself a task at all similar to this; St. John expressly denies his own completeness, and asserts that his purpose is primarily spiritual; and this is true of them all. They are all Gospels rather than biographies; they all have one characteristic thought of the Lord's life which they wish to illustrate. Till we know the purpose and the occasion, the exact weight to be attached to variations cannot be properly estimated. In all probability they were written partly for missionary purposes, to expand such a short narrative as that given in 1 Cor. xv. 1–10; partly for apologetic reasons, to answer the objections of Jew and Gentile. "How can you believe in a crucified Messiah?" was a frequent taunt, and the answer came in a narrative which was essentially a "Passions-Geschichte," showing that the suffering was the climax of a ministry in which a Life had been given as a ransom

for many, and was only a stage towards a Risen Life. "What right have you to go about the world claiming to forgive sins?" would be another challenge, and the answer came in the account of the life of One Who claimed to be God's Son, Who claimed to have received authority on earth to forgive, Who substantiated that claim by action, and Who handed on that power to His followers. This last I myself believe to be one of the main purposes which led to the writing of St. Mark's Gospel, but I could not prove it; and yet the importance attached to miracle must depend very much on the occasion and purpose of the composition.

There remains one further consideration bearing on the question. The life described in the Gospels is admittedly many-sided, and moving on a level far above that of ordinary men. The teaching and the actions were often misinterpreted in His lifetime; the Teacher was constantly spiritualising Jewish language, Apocalyptic and other, which He found ready to His hand; His followers were constantly materialising His teaching. The conception of what the Teacher was grew very gradually in the minds of those most intimate with Him. When it had grown it was shattered by the Crucifixion, and gradually it had to be rebuilt and reinterpreted in the light of the Resurrection. Is not such a life exactly the life which most needs some distance in order to see it in true proportion? All the Gospels are, indeed, later than most of St. Paul's Epistles; they come from a

Church and are accepted by a Church which was accustomed to his high Christology and teaching about the Spirit ; and yet, on the whole, they reproduce in a striking degree the thought of the earlier days ; they show the gradual deepening of insight into the meaning of the life. From the first His followers feel His uniqueness and supremacy ; but this grows more and more clear ; it is the Son of God Who has been among them ; it is the Word of God which has spoken, and which has revealed the Invisible God. That is their great message ; in comparison with that the human limitations were as nothing ; everything which illustrates that is really illuminating. Gradually all that had lain implicit in the consciousness of the Church is drawn out and published that the whole world may know ; and it is therefore as likely as not that the writer of the Fourth Gospel is far nearer to the true interpretation of what Jesus said and did and was than the compiler of Q.

II. A second line of argument arises from the results of the literary analysis of the Old Testament. That has shown that the Jews had a different conception of writing history from our own, and that they attributed to a founder such as Moses or Solomon or David all that had been the outcome of this work ; or, again, that they often used the method of allegory where we had not suspected it, inventing a story with elaborate incidents merely as an illustration of spiritual truth. This last is the

method which most directly affects the treatment of miracles. If the Book of Jonah is, as some hold, only an imaginary story intended to illustrate God's tenderness to the heathen world, and never intended to be regarded as historical fact, we have here a powerful solvent to apply to the miraculous narratives of the New Testament. How easy to reduce the Nature miracles, the Turning of the Water into Wine, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Withering of the Barren Fig-tree to the imaginative embodiment by the Lord Himself or by the Evangelist of the spiritual truths that underlie them! The Resurrection of Lazarus, the Virgin Birth, the literal Resurrection of the Lord may be quickly made to disappear from the realm of fact.

Yet there are many considerations which give us pause before we hastily apply the solvent in this way. In the first place, it is clear that both the Lord and the Evangelists were conscious of the distinction between an illustrative imaginary picture and the narrative of a fact. They had their literary form for the expression of the former; that was the parable of the Synoptists, the allegory of the Fourth Gospel. We do not seem more justified in neglecting this distinction than we should be in neglecting the distinction between Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and his *Grace Abounding*. Again, there can be very little doubt that the accounts of the Virgin Birth, the miracles, the bodily Resurrection were intended to be believed as facts, and were

accepted as literal facts by the Church ; they are treated by the Evangelists and by all writers of the second century as being on the same level as the Crucifixion ; but there is no evidence that the narrative of Jonah was either so intended or so accepted. It is quite obvious that this solvent, if taken by itself, unqualified by some such wider considerations, proves far too much. If it can be applied to the Nature miracles, quite as easily can it be applied to the miracles of healing, each of which will only be a symbol of the effect of Christ's teaching on diseased and palsied souls ; and yet there are few facts better attested or more credible than most of these bodily cures. If it can be applied to the bodily Resurrection of the Lord, no less easily can it be applied to the literal Crucifixion ; that may only be a symbol of the way in which the Prophet of Nazareth died to sin or to Jewish prejudice, and then became a permanent influence upon His followers. On this method the Gospels would be evidence only of the high and spiritual teaching of one of whose birth and death we knew nothing, and who confirmed his teaching by no striking acts. And yet the evidence of a literal Crucifixion in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar comes to us on the authority of Tacitus ; and yet it was a life of such a kind that from the first miraculous action was felt to be appropriate to it ; and yet, if we may trust St. Paul, His followers from the first laid even greater stress upon the facts of His Death and Resurrection than

upon the details of His teaching. This at least is certain, that there was present at that time a Personality which has moved the world ever since, and which has lifted men's conception alike of Divine and of human nature, and of the power of each to affect history.

It may indeed be said that the effect is more wonderful without the help of miracle; more wonderful if, without the literal fact of a Resurrection, the influence of the life availed within three days to revive the shattered hopes of His followers; that what we have lost in miracle we have gained in personality. That is quite true; but when we have gained it in our conception of His Personality, how much more easy, how natural, it becomes to believe that such a Personality could do works above those of ordinary men, that there was something unusual about His Birth and Death. In every great genius, in every great leader, we find ourselves in the presence of a power beyond that of other men to control and mould and unite the minds of men, often to mould, control, and turn into higher uses the forces in Nature. There lies within the capacity of human nature something akin to the miraculous. But in the case of our Lord we find ourselves in the Presence, not simply of a great man, but of One Whom time has proved to be the greatest of men; One Who claimed for Himself the title of the Son of Man, to Whom was delegated all the authority which God ever delegates to man, Whose

works, therefore, outline and anticipate all that humanity can achieve in the process of the centuries, if guided, as He was, by the Spirit of God. In all thought of Him we are bound to leave room for the element of mystery, for the fact of uniqueness, even while we may believe that His miracles are but prophecies of that which humanity itself may achieve, transmuting, extending, dominating the forces of Nature until it, too, rises in a final resurrection to its ultimate perfection.

CHRISTIAN MIRACLES

By the Rev. A. C. HEADLAM, D.D.
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I should be glad if I might be allowed to make a few observations on the articles of Mr. Thompson, Mr. Lake, and others in *The Guardian* on the subject of Christian Miracles. As I understand their position, it is that, owing to the progress of critical studies and the exigencies of evidence, they are compelled to the conclusion that the miraculous element must be banished from the Gospels, and that, though we have adequate grounds for believing in the doctrine of the Incarnation, we have no sufficient grounds for accepting the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, or miracles generally.

I

I will begin with the critical question. Mr. Thompson asks us a certain number of somewhat rhetorical questions, to all of which I should be compelled, if I gave a succinct answer, to say No, but which demand in some cases a more lengthy reply. "Is it true," he asks, "that the only body of tradition which rivals St. Mark as an early and

good authority contains no evidence for miracles ? " This question is, I think, characteristic. Let us notice, in the first place, that the contents of this authority, which is generally known as " Q," are, as a matter of fact, purely hypothetical. According to some scholars, it was a Gospel overlapping that of St. Mark—perhaps even one of the sources used by St. Mark—and contained a large number of narratives of miracles. In fact its reconstruction is most precarious. The question, then, is not a very wise one in any case. But, of course, Mr. Thompson means " Q " as reconstructed at the present time by Harnack and certain other scholars. He means, in fact, the current hypothesis. But according to the theory upon which this hypothesis is made the document was simply a collection of discourses, and, if that be so, it would be most unnatural to expect that it would contain much if anything about miraculous events. But, as a matter of fact, it does contain at least one miracle, and it also contains very much stronger evidence as to miracles than any record of individual acts would imply. Of course, I am aware that Mr. Thompson has explained away the miracle, but I am at present concerned not with the question whether the story is true, but whether it is contained in " Q." But, apart from this story, the evidence of the other passages is far more striking. There are certainly three passages in which our Lord Himself is definitely represented as claiming to have worked

miracles. The references are the answer to the Baptist, the discourse on casting out devils through Beelzebub, and the mighty works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida. It is, of course, true that we do not know the exact character of these mighty works. But to one who believes that our Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God this definite statement that He worked miracles, coming as it does from Himself on the authority of what we are told is the best source for His teaching, must surely count for a great deal. In fact in this document, which might quite reasonably have no reference to miracles at all, we find that there is the very strongest evidence. Does not this throw some illumination on Mr. Thompson's methods ?

Mr. Thompson, again, asks us whether we do not recognise that the repetition of an incident in St. Matthew and St. Luke which was drawn originally from St. Mark alone adds no additional evidence ? Of course we do, but the rhetorical form of the question conceals the point at issue, which is whether or not in certain cases there may not have been some additional evidence which accounted for the variations. He then asks further whether we do not recognise that those stories which are contained only in documents peculiar to one Gospel have less evidence in their favour. We ask why this should be. Mr. Thompson reminds us that those contained in St. Mark according to his theory have only the evidence of one document in their favour. Now

St. Luke tells us that there were many sources. Of these, one we possess ; one we think we can reconstruct. In what way are they necessarily better than other sources which we do not possess ? Dr. Sanday gives it as his opinion, which is worth something, that the first two chapters are shown by internal evidence to be based on one of the oldest of Christian documents. The "special source" seems in its teaching and its style to be an excellent example of Gospel narrative. Why are these less trustworthy than the other single source ? And let it be noted that all these sources contain evidence of what are conventionally called miracles.

Without criticising Mr. Thompson's language any further, might I sum up the position with regard to the general character of evidence for the miracles in the New Testament ? The writings of the Apostolic age show us that St. Paul himself believed that he himself worked miracles, and that miraculous gifts were believed to be possessed by the Christian Church in its early days. We have a considerable amount of evidence about the life of our Lord drawn from several different documents. The earliest Gospel we possess gives us clear and definite narratives of a miraculous character. All the other sources corroborate it. They clearly imply that the disciples had to a certain extent been attracted by the miracles which they believed were accomplished. They represent our Lord as claiming to work miracles and using them as a sign of His

authority. All these statements are entirely corroborated by the criticism to which Mr. Thompson appeals, and it may be interesting to ask what has been the effect of recent criticism on the problem. It has made our evidence more clear, more precise, and more definite. Thanks to the labours of Sir John Hawkins, followed up by Professor Harnack's work, both examples of scientific and objective criticism, we are enabled to assert now more positively than was possible twenty years ago that St. Luke wrote the third Gospel; with all that that implies. I know more certainly than I then did that St. Mark's Gospel was used by St. Matthew and St. Luke. I am able to examine the manner in which they used it, and I find that though they may have made stylistic alterations, though they have possibly at times exaggerated slightly, and have at other times smoothed over difficulties in some degree, they have made no substantial change of any sort either in the narrative or in the aspect of our Lord as contained in the Gospel. Half of the difficulties I used to feel in dealing with the Acts of the Apostles are now dismissed as of no account. I am beginning to think that after all the year 62 may be the date of its composition. If I look back upon a period of about thirty years in which I have been directly interested in the criticism of the New Testament, I am astonished at the progress that has been made, and at the confidence with which I am able to speak about many things owing to the

advance which objective and scientific criticism has caused. Professor Harnack and Mr. Thompson will no doubt answer that all this makes no difference, and that really events in the first century moved much faster than we think; but I cannot feel that they will find it so easy to sustain their propositions as when there was a vague feeling that the Acts and St. Luke were both second-century compilations. Mr. Thompson talks somewhat loudly of criticism, but I do not find anything in criticism, as I know it, to justify his attitude.

II

And now as to evidence. The particular point of Mr. Thompson's argument lies in the fact that, according to him, miracles may be divided into two classes. The one class contains all those, such as casting out devils, the healing of the sick, the cleansing of lepers, which have to do with bodily healing. These, he says, really happened, but they are not miracles at all; they are only instances of faith-healing and exorcism, which are "natural law" and not miracles. All others, he says, would be real miracles if they occurred, but they did not happen. They are the result of an uneducated, unscientific, perhaps superstitious and excited state of public opinion.

Let me for a moment deal with this statement. Miracles, Mr. Thompson tells us, are the result of an uneducated public opinion. They are

the result of credulity. But, according to Mr. Thompson, at least three-quarters of the miracles which people believed in were, as a matter of fact, true. Thus, therefore, those which credulity made them believe are reduced to very small numbers. Now this presents a very interesting situation. If Mr. Thompson had written some thirty or forty years ago in the same scientific, or pseudo-scientific, spirit he would have told us with certainty that all these miracles alike were untrue. He would have traced the development of the miracles in every case, and not merely in those which he was not prepared to accept, and he would have tried to account for this development of public credulity. But nowadays, having discovered what he calls "natural law," he tells us that, as a matter of fact, three-quarters of these events did happen. Is it not possible that in the course of the next twenty years he may discover some other "natural law," and that then he will admit that some other of these events happened, and will not find it necessary to have recourse to such very elaborate methods for explaining them away? Does it not strike us that, after all, it is not a question of evidence, but of something else? The credulous crowd in Palestine who believed that our Lord cured a man sick of the palsy and the ordinary believing Christian fifty years ago who accepted the testimony of the Bible on this point were, it seems, right, and the "critic" who told us that it was a case of myth or imposture

was wrong. Are we quite certain that the critic at the present day is the one who is right ?

Let us take as an illustration two narratives in St. Mark's Gospel—one the healing of the paralytic in the second chapter, the other the miraculous feeding in the wilderness. Now, according to Mr. Thompson, the first is true and the latter is not true. Why is that ? I suppose he would say it is a question of evidence. But that is just what it is not. The evidence for the miraculous feeding is as good as, or even better than, that for the healing of the paralytic. It will not appeal indeed to Mr. Thompson to lay stress on the fact that this miracle is contained in St. John, for he would assume that the latter copied it, but it must appeal to him that as this is probably what is called a " doublet " in St. Mark, it was contained in both his sources, and that it therefore belongs to the early structure of the Gospel history and to the early days of Christianity. It is probably as well authenticated as anything in the Gospels. Yet Mr. Thompson will not allow us to believe in it, and tries to explain how it arose. He refers in his work on *Miracles* to some of the explanations which have been given, and writes of them as follows : " The rationalistic line of explanation here, as in the last incident, is too simple. The mythological is too superficial. What is wanted is some reconstruction of the facts which is psychologically appropriate, which makes the original incident important enough to be

reported, and the circumstances such as might give rise to the idea of a miracle," and he then goes on to suggest his own explanation. Let us be quite clear that this is not criticism, but guesswork. Mr. Thompson, like others, does not believe in the incident, not because the evidence is worse than that of the story of the paralytic, but because he has difficulties of an *a priori* character, and therefore he, like others, attempts to explain it away. Here, then, are two reputed miracles; one, we are told, is true, the other is not. Mr. Thompson may be right in his judgment; but let us be quite clear that his conclusion has nothing to do with evidence; he manipulates his evidence to suit the conclusion.

III

Mr. Thompson challenges us again by the question, "Are not the miracles in the New Testament exactly the same as those in other religious movements?" Let us refer again to the incident already quoted—the healing of the paralytic—and let any one read that narrative, and then consider if it is really paralleled in the history of other religious movements. There is the prominence with which the spiritual element is put first; there is the solemn assumption of spiritual authority, the authoritative pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins; there is a confident appeal to what appears to be a miraculous power, and there is the striking and successful result. Where else do we read at any other time

of any one acting thus ? If that is, as we are told, an example of faith-healing, what faith-healer can act in this way ?

But let us come back to the dilemma on which Mr. Thompson has impaled himself, and which is the real source of his point of view. The events, he tells us, described as miracles in the New Testament are "either in accordance with natural law," in which case they are not miracles at all, or else they are not so, in which case they cannot have happened, for nothing can happen except in accordance with "natural law." Therefore there is no such thing as a miracle, and so-called miracles could never have any evidential value, because they are either untrue or they are merely a misunderstanding of something which was quite natural. Now here we have really got to the secret of Mr. Thompson's position. All his talk of criticism and of evidence has little or nothing to do with the question. They are only the clothes in which he wraps up his real argument. We come back to the old story—miracles cannot happen ; if they happen, they are not miracles. I do not propose to spend any time in discussing the slipshod metaphysics and crude logic which underlie Mr. Thompson's theory. It will, I trust, be better to put forward a constructive theory which will, I hope, harmonise somewhat better with the really good evidence which the Gospel narratives give us.

There are very probably—at any rate Mr. Thomp-

son assures us that it is so—certain phenomena in the world which, for want of a better name, we may call "spiritual." They seem to represent the power of mind over matter, of mental over physical states. We know very little about them, but we find them always intensified in connection with living religious faith. It used to be the fashion to put all these alike down to superstition and credulity, but the tendency of modern investigation is to suggest that there is something in them. What is called faith-healing seems sometimes to effect cures. Very often it does not. Those who practise it even unsuccessfully are not impostors, but they are carried away with the idea that they really have the power which perhaps they possess in only a very slight way. This power of faith is strongest in connection with religious life, strongest in connection with persons of saintly character, although it is always—as we know it—very feeble.

Now, taking the Gospel narratives just as they are, we find ourselves in the presence of phenomena such as these, but in a very different degree, and characterised by a strange note of authority that we do not find elsewhere. So far as we can judge, these powers were not tentative, imperfect, or unsuccessful, but they were restrained and real. It is just this that the people who flocked to them felt. Here there was real power. What happened in the case of those possessed with devils is just an instance. Here it is that this spiritual power works

most easily. For the disease in question is often purely functional. There were some Jews who had the power of what was called "casting out spirits," although probably they were not very successful, just as there are people at the present day who have some power of control over early stages of hysteria. But all felt that with Jesus it was something quite different. "With authority He commands the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." There were other things far more wonderful that He did similar in character, so they flocked to Him attracted by His spiritual force, and felt that there was a new prophet. Some remained with Him, others turned aside. He was, after all, disappointing. He would not work any conspicuous miraculous sign. There was no thaumaturgic display such as the Messiah, according to them, might be expected to make. He would not let them make Him king—the reason, of course, being that He had a far higher and more spiritual aim than anything that they understood.

Now, we appeal to Mr. Thompson. He believes that Jesus Christ was the Incarnate Son of God. As such He was Himself the source of all spiritual life, such as we know, in the world. If there is any spiritual power among us, however imperfect, it must be that it comes from Him Who is the source of all such power. If He came into the world, there would be just that force and power in a manner entirely different from what it would be in any

others. If, then, I find in the narratives about Jesus clear evidence of such power, it seems to me real proof that here was a spiritual force and authority different from that which has ever appeared in the world before or since ; and that is just what I do find. I find inextricably bound up in the whole of the New Testament narrative, so as to be inseparable from it, a definite spiritual force. I find that all authorities alike tell us of the miraculous character of Jesus' life. I find that He clearly had, and believed that He had, such powers as other men had not, and that He appealed to them as a proof of His authority. I find that those disciples of His who gave up their lives to Him were clearly convinced that He was possessed with these powers. The evidence would, therefore, lead me to accept this position, and because I have this evidence of spiritual force such as I have never found elsewhere, I have, I believe, some reasons for believing in the existence of a unique spiritual personality. It is only a part of the evidence—not a very important part, perhaps, but it is a portion of that on which I would build up my Christian belief.

The fact is that Mr. Thompson and Mr. Edghill and some others have a curious and entirely unscientific idea of what they call "natural law." They write as if they thought that Nature is kept in order by a number of rules with which they are fully acquainted, and which it must not transgress. What they speak of under the entirely misleading

and somewhat imposing name of "natural laws" are really the somewhat imperfect generalisations in which we sum up our scientific knowledge. These generalisations are continually expanding and changing, and an instance of this is the fact that Mr. Thompson (somewhat prematurely, if I may trust my scientific friends) has discovered that faith-healing may be described as a "natural law." Not only that, but he seems to know exactly how far it will go, what is possible, and what is not. He talks somewhat in the way that a man might have done in the early days of electricity; he felt certain that you could communicate across the Thames, but considered it impossible to communicate across the Channel. If there are spiritual forces in the world, we know nothing of their limitations. We have no means of knowing on *a priori* grounds which of such events as are recorded in the Gospel were possible. We may be quite willing to believe that the Evangelists or the writers of their sources were, like other men, fallible, but we are careful not to make ourselves ridiculous by writing childish explanations of events which we do not understand. Only let us be quite clear. The fact of the existence of this spiritual force in the world may not be as clearly proved as Mr. Thompson seems to think. But if it is true, it does not take away from the evidential character of the phenomena recorded in the Gospels. It gives us rather some corroboration of the simple, natural, and spon-

taneous judgment of the people of Galilee, who felt that here was a Prophet Who had come into the world.

IV

It would take me too long to go fully into the question of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. I would only refer to them as illustrating even more conspicuously than has been possible so far Mr. Thompson's methods, and I hope it will be clearly understood that this is not intended to be a complete discussion on the subject. Let us take first of all the value of the argument from silence. When we use that argument, we must ask whether there was any reason why the document in question should have contained the information which we find that it omits. An admirable instance of the precariousness of this argument is shown by the Acts of the Apostles. It would be quite possible—in fact Mr. Thompson does it to a certain extent—to draw attention to the fact that here you have a document giving a narrative of the early days of Christianity which shows very inadequate knowledge of the life of our Lord, and no knowledge at all of the Virgin Birth. Yet this document was written by some one who had already written the third Gospel. So with regard to St. Paul's Epistles. Supposing for a moment that by some accident the First Epistle to the Corinthians had been lost, and we possessed only the remainder

of the Apostle's writings, we should no doubt have it pointed out to us, even more strongly than it is at present, that there was no knowledge of our Lord's life, and that in particular the Resurrection and the Last Supper were things about which St. Paul knew nothing. The real fact is, of course, that the absence of all this information from the Epistles arose from the fact that St. Paul himself and those he was writing to were fully acquainted with the matters in question, and he deals with those points on which difficulties had arisen. St. Luke was a companion of St. Paul, and he had a full knowledge of the narratives existing in the early Church about the life of our Lord. Is it then conceivable that St. Paul would not have had this knowledge? With regard to the Gospels of St. Mark and St. John, in both cases their purpose is to begin with the baptism of John the Baptist, and the reason was the same in both. St. John's Gospel claims to be the evidence of an eyewitness, and St. Mark's Gospel clearly gives us the witness of the Apostles to those historical facts of which they had personal knowledge. It must be recognised that the documents of the New Testament are short, that they are fragmentary, and that they content themselves with dealing with the particular point before them, and not with the thousands of other questions about which we should like now to have information.

Still more characteristic is the method of dealing

with St. Luke's Gospel. How can the evidence of this Gospel be evaded? It is suggested that we should do so by leaving out the verses which contain that evidence, and it is suggested that the single verse which it is proposed to omit conflicts with the rest of the narrative. "The best solution of the difficulties of the passage," that is the way in which this is put—the difficulties meaning the difficulties which arise for a person who wishes to evade the evidence. But if any one reads through the narrative he will see that this somewhat drastic method makes the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel meaningless. Why is it that in verse 27 so much stress is laid upon the Virgin? Verse 35 is clearly introduced to explain verse 34, and verse 35 is one of the best-authenticated verses in the New Testament, being quoted by Justin. Verses 36 and 37 clearly show that something remarkable is being referred to. In chapter ii. we are told that Mary was Joseph's espoused wife. The point which I wish to emphasise is that the evidence does not compel us to Mr. Thompson's belief, but that he arrives at it on other grounds, and then tries to get rid of the evidence.[1]

[1] I cannot help having some personal interest in the method with which verses 34, 35 are treated. Originally an attempt was made to give textual ground for the omission. On that point I had some considerable discussion with Mr. Conybeare in *The Guardian* in 1903. Now I gather from Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, that that attempt may be considered to have broken down. But the necessity of removing the evidence of these verses still remains, so recourse is now had to purely internal evi-

This becomes still more conspicuous when we deal with the Resurrection. Mr. Thompson divides the evidence into two. There is the evidence for the empty tomb, and the evidence for the appearances of our Lord. He is prepared to believe the latter, but is not prepared to believe the former. But, as a matter of fact, the evidence for the empty tomb is really the better of the two. We have on its behalf what Mr. Lake calls "the main stream of synoptic tradition," which when he is discussing the Virgin Birth he thinks so much better than other sources. Moreover, we have indirect evidence of a much stronger character. The words "He rose again on the third day" represent a formula older almost than any other in Christianity, and the reason on which that precision was based must have been the empty tomb. Further, we know quite well that early in the history of Christianity, for some reason not otherwise explained, the Christians had adopted the first day of the week as their sacred day. Let us remember also that there is far more discrepancy in the evidence about the appearances of our Lord than there is about the empty tomb, and that many of these appearances as narrated are quite inconsistent with Mr. Thompson's theory. The real fact, again, is that Mr. Thompson is not guided by the evidence, but moulds the evidence in accord-

dence. How precarious and unsubstantial such methods of discovering interpolations are every one must recognise.

ance with the theories that he believes to be true. It could be wished that Mr. Lake had been a little more explicit on the subject. If he only means that the resurrection of the body is to be taken in the sense in which quite possibly St. Paul used it, then he would not be speaking inconsistently with Christian theology or tradition. St. Paul, as he himself confesses, might have believed, and as we believe certainly did believe, in the empty tomb. But what Mr. Lake appears to mean is that our Lord's Body really remained in the grave, and that there was nothing to distinguish His appearance from ordinary hallucinations and visions.

Both Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lake appeal in a somewhat pretentious manner to the results of the critical study of the New Testament—"Unless we are prepared to throw over the results of fifty years' study of the Synoptic Gospels," is Mr. Lake's expression. There is a good deal of pretentiousness and a good deal of confusion in this. There are really two types of criticism. The one is that which may be represented by the very careful studies of Bishop Lightfoot on Ignatius, or by those of Sir John Hawkins and some of the other Oxford workers on the Synoptic problem. That work is slow, patient, and methodical. It always seeks for objective evidence. It distrusts impressions. It is not too anxious to arrive at a conclusion; but it tries to build up its results on a basis independent of the particular opinions of the

worker. It was such criticism as that which was looked forward to at the time when the Seminar which has done this work was first started at Oxford. The second type of criticism is one which is exceedingly attractive and exceedingly misleading. It consists of building up a theory, often interesting and ingenious, on somewhat imperfect generalisations, and then adapting the remainder of the evidence to that theory. It is methods such as these latter which have dominated Continental work for the last fifty years. To the person working the methods seem supremely convincing; he is absorbed in his point of view, and cannot think how things can look different to other people, and it seems to him quite natural to explain away the various difficulties which beset his conclusion. To certain of his supporters these theories seem equally convincing, but their real support is so subjective that they quickly pass away when rival theories take the ground. That is what has been happening for the last fifty years. Theory after theory has been put forward. Those at the present day are in many ways quite different from those with which we had to deal twenty years ago, and then we were discovering how erroneous the theories of the 'fifties were. It is that method of which Mr. Thompson's book is one of the most striking examples we have met with. He is so absorbed in his own point of view that he entirely fails to see how subjective much of it is, and how unsubstantial

a great deal of the investigation which he calls "criticism" is. Both he and Mr. Lake are trying to persuade us that they are guided by the evidence, but so soon as we begin to read their works we find that they are devoting all their energies and their exceedingly ingenious methods to manipulating the evidence to suit their conclusions. The whole appears very imposing until we read some one who is prepared to manipulate the evidence from a different point of view, and then we see how fallacious all this subjective work is.

THE CONDITIONS OF GOSPEL CRITICISM

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I

The Rev. J. M. Thompson's recent book (*Miracles in the New Testament*, Arnold, 3s. 6d. net) is typical of much contemporary criticism; and for that reason deserves serious consideration. Mr. Thompson has been perfectly frank and honest and straightforward in his statement of his position, and he will expect those who challenge the position to be equally frank and straightforward in their criticism of it. I am therefore sure that he will not misunderstand my motives if I speak my mind freely.

We, and he, as professed teachers in the Fellowship, are responsible for the Creed which is based on the unique historic experience of those who came under the immediate pressure of an incomparable Personality Whom they saw, touched, heard, and felt, both in His Life and in His Death and in His Resurrection from the dead. It is this experience, summed up in a Creed, which we, by the Spirit, profess to confirm out of our experience

and to justify and interpret by our understanding. In the presence, then, of a book such as this, our question is, Can this Creed, so based, justify itself by this professed explanation ? Is it patient of it ? Can it be set out in these terms ? Is it illuminated and liberated by this handling ? Or, on the contrary, does it, if thus interpreted, totally fail to account for itself ? Does it emerge from the process stripped of all its vital elements ? Mr. Thompson is not attacking the Creed. He believes in the Incarnation, and hopes to free it from what has hitherto served to disguise its character. Has he, then, been successful or not ?

It seems to me that the mind and the method with which the book is put together have made success impossible from the start. On these lines he was bound never to arrive. He could not ever hope to account for the facts which he set out to explain.

Take, first, his treatment of the Gospels which are our sole record of that unique historic experience which was theirs who lived and ate and drank with our Lord when on earth. Mr. Thompson allows that these records as we have them issued from a body of believers already in possession of the Christology of St. Paul's Epistle. They are not isolated fragments dropped from the sky. They belong to a community ; they represent its temper or belief ; they are coloured by its after-Creed even in their most original sources. " There is no such thing as a purely historical Gospel, a bare record of

facts. All the Gospels are more or less sermons, works of apologetic, manuals of theology. In all of them the facts are interpreted by faith. . . . The development of the miraculous element in the Gospels is only one instance of this general principle."

But if this is so, then the Gospels must be interpreted in relation to their context and the conditions under which they were produced. They must be judged by the situation to which they belong. They must be kept in touch with its atmosphere and quality. Their evidential value will turn on their relationship to their living environment. And the moment we have said that, we should see that the amazing thing about them was the limitation, not the presence, of the Christological influence. How on earth did these writers manage to leave out of account so much of what they then believed, and to transport themselves back to those early days in which the Disciples had no suspicion of what lay before them ? How did they recover the very tone and temper of that primitive ignorance ? How could they keep the Christ Whom they now worshipped down within those narrow local Jewish circles of habit and interest and dispute ? How can they tell the plain story with hardly a hint of what it has now become to them ? How can they prevent a burning problem such as that of Jew and Gentile, and of meats and drinks, from even ruffling the surface of the story, so that, at most, it may

possibly appear in the passing note, thrown into a parenthesis, by St. Mark ? How can St. Luke, holding the full Pauline belief in the mystery of the Sacrifice of Christ, our Passover, upon the Cross for the sin of the world, tell the whole long story of the Crucifixion without a suggestion anywhere of what for him lay behind it ? This is the astounding miracle of the Synoptic Gospels. By the side of this extraordinary recapture of the facts as they were felt and known, before they had been taken up into the form of Eternity, the minor indications of the Christological influence which has touched up a phrase here and there vanish into insignificance. The task set to criticism is to explain why this influence was so marvellously restrained; why it appears so little ; how it can possibly have been so resolutely excluded. Regarded in the real historical setting out of which they come, the unaffected primitiveness of the Synoptic record is the one outstanding phenomenon that has to be accounted for.

And, far from this Christological Faith always showing itself in the form of miraculous addition to the original story (as Mr. Thompson suggests), it is exactly at the point where the later Christology would exercise the highest pressure, that the miraculous element wholly disappears. For it is the Death, the Passion, the Crucifixion, which carried in them the full Mystery of Salvation. It was on these that the Christology was concentrated. In

these it saw a " Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In them the Sacred Counsel of God was revealed by which all racial distinctions were broken down through the rending of the flesh, and all Sin was nailed to the Tree, and Humanity died to its Past, and the Old Adam in us was slain. Here it is that the full-charged Faith beholds the Heaven breaking through the dark. Yet it is exactly here that the fact is told in its plainest detail, at length, precisely as it was done. It is here that the sheer human nature of our Lord is exhibited in its most unqualified nakedness. Not a symptom of " miracle " occurs anywhere up to the very moment of death. It is expressly excluded. It is declared by our Lord Himself to be utterly out of place. For the necessities of relentless history lie heavy upon Him ; He is bound vigorously by the sequences of the past. If He were to appeal for a legion of angels to intervene, how would " the Scriptures be fulfilled " ? His strict limitation to the conditions of His human existence is here at its very height. He has been born into the natural story which the Scriptures record, and He carries it all along with Him. He is bound hand and foot by it, so entirely is He a man. What is the sense of talking as if St. Matthew and St. Luke were afraid of allowing full value to the human nature of Jesus so long as both tell the tale of Gethsemane ? No Christology mitigates one whit the human agony of the prayer to be spared the Cup. We are shown

the Lord in His weakness, in His shrinking, in His moral strife, learning obedience. And this at the very heart of that hour which the Christological Creed transfigured.

It is untrue, then, to say that this Christology would be sure to lay undue stress on the Divine, on the miraculous, when the supreme fact of the Passion on which the later Christology concentrated attention and adoration, was left in its utter, naked, hard, unadulterated simplicity—a fact just as it stood, and nothing more—a fact unexplained and uninterpreted, just as it was seen by those who had as yet no interpretation to give to it, and went away from the sight of it in unrelieved despair, supposing that He Who was to have redeemed Israel had been forsaken by the God to Whom He had cried in vain from the agony of the Cross. Evidently the Christological influence does not serve inevitably to create the miraculous, for in this crucial test-case it does precisely the contrary.

Once allow, then, that the Gospels are to be read in their context, in the atmosphere and under the pressure of the later Christology, and our confidence in their practical historicity is amazingly reinforced. Their capacity and their accuracy in distinguishing between what was understood at the time and what was interpreted later offer a problem to criticism for which there is no parallel. But in Mr. Thompson's book the existence of the later Christology, instead of emphasising the contrast between the

narrative and itself, only serves to spread doubt over everything. It is assumed that it must have acted as a distorting element. It will be sure to have brought in the unnatural and the miraculous. It will tend to obliterate the humanity of Jesus, and to exalt the divinity. It is to be detected at this work in the First and Third Gospels. And there is no reason to suggest that it had not already affected the original sources, both of these Gospels and of St. Mark. How can we tell that it has not? There is, therefore, no "purely historical Gospel, only apologies and sermons." This is said in spite of the fact that the one thing to be accounted for is how and why the Synoptic Gospels are not "works of apologetic, manuals of theology, or sermons." How was it that, written at such a time as they were, they avoided being all this? How was it (we repeat) that, in spite of the full Creed which they already held, they could tell the plain story of the Crucifixion, without a word of application, or interpretation, or theology, or apologetic—without a syllable to reveal that anything is happening but a human tragedy—an unmitigated historical disaster, an inexplicable withdrawal of God? Such criticism as this leaves out the one phenomenon that it is called upon to explain.

The fatal weakness of this type of criticism comes, as we have seen, from its tendency to isolate the Synoptic material from all that might give it worth. It is taken out of its atmosphere and handled in

the void. First, it is reduced to its minimum—a ground document in St. Mark. Then every divergence from this base, instead of being regarded as possibly contributing new light, is treated as overwork done on the top of the primal document through some deliberate motive. Motives of the most arbitrary and petty character are suggested, with a casualness that seems hardly serious. Intimate knowledge of a far-away situation is assumed. Take an instance or two from Mr. Thompson's book. He has to account for a couple of stories told by St. Mark being omitted by St. Matthew and St. Luke. Why should this be ? Probably, he suggests, because they were not miraculous enough to suit their taste. Such an explanation is gratuitous. Half a dozen other reasons could be imagined. Yet our author, with other critics, is quite satisfied with it. Or, again, we find fewer miracle records by St. Mark after our Lord left Galilee as He came towards Jerusalem. How was this ? Probably Peter had been carried away by the Galilean enthusiasm into ascribing wonders to the Master. Now he had seen his mistake, and had come to know Him better. This is offered as a plausible hypothesis, without any attempt to discuss the resolute determination ascribed to our Lord by all the Gospels to get away from the healings and the works of power, and leave them behind and to avoid them, in order to get forward with the higher work of the Baptism with which he was straitened. These instances are but

typical of a crowd of others, in which the suggested motives at work in the compilers of the narratives are nothing less than hypothetical speculations of a very modern writer, throwing off what he, at this far-off distance, may fancy to have been the reasons governing writings produced under conditions very remote and but superficially guessed at. They hardly pretend to be anything more. Yet, if this type of underground motive may be at work anywhere and everywhere, what have we got to rely on? Where has the real story gone to? What can we count upon with any security at all? We are left at last with a bare residuum of such matter as we can detect behind the motived over-work—matter which may itself have been over-worked already for all that we know. Then we try to rest the entire weight of Christian evidence on this tiny doubtful deposit, itself suspect and uncertain; and, no doubt, thus isolated and sterilised, it is totally unable by itself to bear the pressure. It goes under.

Mr. Thompson argues that the earlier the document, the less is the amount of miracle recorded. The argument has no value so far as it rests on Q; for Q, so far as we know its purpose, would obviously not have been concerned to record miracles. Does Mr. Thompson mean that if we had the earliest record, there would have been no miracles at all? If so, we are totally without an idea of what that record would have been. The conclusion would

simply be that we have no reliable record at all. Miracles may be gone : but so are the Gospels.

Here, again, Criticism has failed to accomplish the one task for which it exists. It has got to account for the existence of Christianity ; for the intense and passionate effect produced by a distinct and vivid and most real Personality ; for the unique supremacy exercised by this Personality, so that He seemed to those who knew Him to be able to offer Himself to entire humanity as its all-sufficing Consolation and its only adequate Support. To them He stood apart, outside human sin, above all conceivable criticism, absolutely self-sufficient, the Master Whom to follow was in itself eternal life. It seemed to them but a little thing that such a One, so strong to save, should inevitably show Himself to be a Healer and a Redeemer from sin. We want to know how it happened that they so thought of Him and so believed. This Criticism only says that it cannot possibly imagine. It can only suppose that all this came in afterwards upon a story that has practically disappeared. There is nothing in the shadowy Jesus that is left to us to explain the exceptional effect that He produced.

II

Two quite special characteristics of the Jesus represented to us through the Synoptic record are wholly omitted in Mr. Thompson's book. No attempt at their treatment, no recognition of their existence, is even offered. Yet they belong to the very heart of the matter.

1. Jesus is represented by the Gospels as having taken up a very definite and deliberate attitude towards His own works of power. He did them under certain recognised conditions, especially at the beginning of a ministry, whether in Judæa or in Galilee. But He set prescribed limitations on them. He profoundly distrusted the general effect produced by them. He got steadily away from them, moving out into desert places and far frontiers to avoid their opportunity. He was weary of a generation that sought after them. He broke up the crowds who desired more and more of them. He did ever less and less of them. That which is most remarkable is that the nearer men came within His circle the less they had of "miracle." They did not need to "rise and walk" as they learned what it was to have their sins forgiven. They need not be spared the pain and distress of life, the closer they drew to Him Who was sufficient for all their needs. Inside the ring of intimate disciples no wonders, at last, were done at all. And this law reaches its climax

in the Master Himself. Of Him it is essentially true that, while saving others, He will not save Himself. Others may be fed with bread in the wilderness, but for Him, Who is Lord of all, no stones may be turned into bread. The old woman with the issue can be freed from the bondage of Satan. But He, the Master, must pass, unresistingly and unaided by angels, under the Power of Darkness. For Himself, no miracle at all. And the closer you are to Him the less will you have of it. Wonder-work was merely a premonitory signal—an inevitable outbreak of the work that was going forward—a sign that the energy of the Kingdom was beginning to stir.

And this deliberate limitation of His own power was no accident—no unreasoned or unconscious instinct. It expressed a purpose that had been won by Him out of severe penitential discipline, wrought out in long wrestlings of soul, under the stars and with the wild beasts in the wilderness, tempted of Satan. That strange story of the Temptation, which can only come from Him Himself, turns, surely, on this very matter. Possessed, as He felt Himself, of the Spirit which had fallen upon Him by Jordan, he must determine absolutely the lines under which He would be in full control of its activities. There must be no arbitrariness in its exercise, no light and loose reliance upon its aid. It must be bound down under the strict limits of the moral will. It must be kept utterly free from all

suspicion of self-regard or self-assertion. It must be secured against hasty exaltation and extravagances of faith. It must be kept down in its subordinate place. It must never confuse or disturb the purity of the strong intention which will take no other way but God's own for the winning of the Kingdom.

Here, then, we have this extraordinary revelation of the inside of our Lord's mind at the beginning of His endowment with these unusual powers, and we have this unique exhibition of the spiritual struggle that is involved in possessing such powers. We see that before He began their use He had taken their exact measure, and had allotted them their precise and limited place, and had won complete moral control, guided by a rare moral insight, over His use of them, and knew how little He would be served by them in His own needs, for Whom the Word of God was to be sufficient without any stones being turned into bread to satisfy His hunger, and Who was forbidden to leap off pinnacles in the blind faith that the angels of God would uphold Him lest He should dash His foot against a stone. Is not this, then, the most remarkable thing about our Lord—not that He worked wonders of healing and help, but that He knew and determined precisely when and where He would not work them? His exhibition of power was absolutely fixed by ethical considerations and was foreseen by Him to be limited by ethical conditions. The capacity so to

work involved Him in the great temptation of His life. And all that He afterwards did in the way of casting out devils was but the proof that He had won self-control in the secret agony of strife with Satan in the wilderness. He Himself traced all His power to cast devils out to that dark struggle. It was then that He had bound the strong man and stripped him of his armour. And, by virtue of the supreme victory, it is easy for Him to go about "spoiling his goods" and setting the prisoners free. So he said. And in estimating His power and work, it is surely of vital importance to take into consideration His own mind about them thus revealed to us—His own estimate and account of their place in His scheme—His own spiritual wrestling over the issues involved in them. In judging them it is essential to know how He Himself thought about them and judged them. Yet here is a book wholly about them which never even refers to our Lord's own witness about His own works. It never introduces material that obviously lies at the very heart of the subject. It never hints that the Synoptic record includes this precious and intimate evidence, or notes how remarkable it is that the inner spiritual agony over the use of this strange energy should have occurred, and should have been carefully recorded. Certainly, the Master and the writers of the record must have been conscious of the moral problems involved in the witness of mighty works. They were aware of the risks, and recognised the

limitations. Criticism is bound to take account of this in estimating the evidence for that occurrence and for their place in the Gospel appeal.

2. Then there is one assumption made throughout every syllable of the record which it is necessary to account for and explain. It is that assumption, on which we have already touched, that the Master stands clear above the reach of man's criticism. He never consults any one. He never needs advice. He never takes their mind into His consideration. They do not affect His counsel. That is, somehow, the impossible thing. This repression was in them instinctive. They could not have said why. Obviously, they did not count in His judgment. They could not be on His level. They were never in possession of His secret. Once, and once only, the bolder and chief of them, in the heat of his generosity and devotion, ventured to protest against the Master's decision and to proffer his own advice. "This be far from Thee, Lord." And the answer flung back made him aware of a limit which he must never presume to cross again. "Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou savourest not the things that be of God; but the things that be of man." This isolation, this independence, this loneliness, this supremacy, of the one central figure pervades the entire presentation. It cannot have been due to afterthought and over-working; for it is inwoven into the very texture of the narrative and is inseparable from it. Jesus never includes Himself with

others, as one among them. He includes them in Himself. He can make them one with Him; but He is never one with them. His personality is of such unique worth that it alone counts, and they in it. And this can be expressed without the slightest blur on the exquisite impression of humility and self-obliteration which is the cardinal note of His character.

This impression of His solitary self-sufficiency is there, imbedded in the entire record, as an inevitable characteristic of the experience which companionship with Jesus involved. Under the dominance of this impression it seemed to them merely natural that He Who stood outside all criticism should Himself stand over the ancient law of God and authoritatively criticise its limitations. It caused them no shock or surprise to hear Him make personal claims which, in any other case, would be inexplicable and intolerable. They could accept without question the assertion that He alone would give worth at the last judgment to any acts of mercy or help done for the suffering and the poor, and that life and death hung in confessing or denying His Name. All this belongs to Him by some undoubted prerogative, which has ceased for them to be open to any doubt or hesitation. It is this unqualified personal predominance which makes His works of power fall into their places. It is portrayed in the story as a sheer moral necessity. It was impossible to be with Him and not to fall into this utter subordi-

nation to Him. Afterwards, as they considered and pondered over their experience, they could not but see in it the witness of that which they had now learned to pronounce Divine. Yet it was, in all its form and expression, purely human. That which they recognised to be Divine showed itself simply in the unique and solitary pre-eminence into which it raised the manhood of their Master.

Now, this impression of His being on a plane beyond their criticism is an essential and crucial feature in the Apostolic experience. If it is dropped out, then that experience is not taken account of, is not reported, is not interpreted. It is shorn of its full significance. It is left unsolved. But under the treatment applied to the narrative by the book now under consideration this sense of the Master's incomparable elevation seems entirely to vanish. We appear to be standing above Him. We pass free criticism on His conduct and teaching. We note His ignorance, His lack of outlook, His tentative policies, His doubtful motives. We wonder how much He was involved in the blunders and exaggerations made by the enthusiasm of His friends. He is regarded as liable to their silly misunderstandings. He shares their confusion of thought, their social limitations, their narrow prejudices. We have to adopt a tone of apology for Him. In all this we have dropped altogether away from the Gospel temper, the Gospel attitude.

We have left out of our picture that particular note in the impression that He made upon His followers, on which their final estimate of His significance depends. We have ceased to accept their estimate of Him just when it is most remarkable and suggestive. We have failed to give a valid account of the deepest element in their experience. It was through this inarticulate and spontaneous surrender of their very selves to His personal authority in actual experience that they found it intelligible to commit their very lives to Him Who rose from the dead. It was just this mastery over their whole being which interpreted itself in the after-Creed. He had been among them ; yet He was never of them. He was so utterly like them ; yet so utterly unlike ; so identified with man ; yet so profoundly and inherently and incomparably alone. This had been the problem, the dilemma, of their strange experience. Here was a man saying and claiming what no sane man could ever say and claim. There was no solution of this antithesis to be found within the terms of His life with them on earth. Only in the light of the Resurrection did it explain itself. Only in the formula " It is not I that live, but Christ that liveth in me " did the inexplicable experience discover its justification. Any presentation, therefore, of that experience which strips it of this pervading character has omitted the heart of the whole matter. It has failed to exhibit the problem which it has

undertaken to solve. It has reduced the historical materials below the level at which they can naturally account either for the works or words of power attributed to the Master while on earth, and for the after-belief which found in these materials its adequate ground.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF MIRACLE

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[Criticism as expressed in Mr. Thompson's book on Miracles [1] regards the belief in miracles as proceeding from the failure to see God in the normal and from the primitive ignorance of uniform laws. The following discourse, preached before the University of Oxford, tries to show that it was through belief in law, and through finding God in the uniformity of Nature, that the Jew went on to a fuller belief. As, originally, it had been his ethical experiences which led him to discover in Nature a God of Law, so his deeper spiritual outlook led him to find in Nature a God Who could make all things new.]

Wisdom is the brightness of the Everlasting Life, the unspotted mirror of the "Power of God and the image of His goodness." "Wisdom," we read in the Book of that name (vii. 26, 27), "is more beautiful than the sun, and above the order of the stars. Being compared with the light, also she is

[1] *Miracles in the New Testament.* By the Rev. J. M. Thompson. Arnold. 3s. 6d. net.

found before it." Can the rapture and exultation of knowledge go beyond this famous passage ? Is it not worthy to be set by the side of the noblest phrases in which Plato has made immortal the honour of Intellectual Beauty ? And no doubt, as we read the Hebraistic parallel, touched as it is by Hellenic influence, we glide into believing that we are handling the same thought and moving in the same atmosphere that is familiar to us in Greek philosophy. We suppose that, in the praise of Wisdom, we are speaking of the high metaphysic by which we may hope to hold communion with Absolute Being.

And is it not, therefore, rather surprising to us to find that for the Jew the knowledge about which he uses this exalted language is not metaphysic, but physical science ? He is not absorbed in abstractions and generalisations. He is not seeking the Unconditional, nor defining the Absolute. His interests are all concrete and immediate. His wonder is spent upon the world that lies about his feet. His curiosity is kindled by sheer observation of facts. He desires, above all, to get to the bottom of the things that he sees and feels. This wisdom of his which he worships as a knight worships his lady, this wisdom which is the " breath of the Power of God, a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty," is a wisdom, near, real, and familiar, which teaches him certain knowledge of " the things that are—namely, to know how the

world was made, and the operation of the elements, the alternation of the turning of the sun, and the change of seasons; the circuit of years, and the position of stars; the natures of living creatures and the furies of wild beasts; the violence of winds and the reasonings of man; the diversities of plants and the virtues of roots; and all such things as are either secret or manifest." These are the things that she has taught him. She has shown him also how the principal things for the whole use of man's life are water, fire, iron, salt, flower of wheat, honey, milk, and the blood of the grape, and oil and clothing—so precise and so exact has been her careful specification of man's bodily needs. Always in this Wisdom literature we find this delight in catalogues, inventories, classifications, that carry you through every scale of gradation, from the cedars of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows on the walls.

It is for the sake of this direct intelligence of things as they are that the Jew has sought her and gloried in her, and loved her above health and beauty and preferred her above sceptres and thrones, and esteemed riches as nothing in comparison with her. It is science, natural and political, that he finds so entirely satisfying. And more especially does he learn from her to delight in the characteristic which we have been taught to associate so intimately with the revelation of modern science —the uniformity of law. "Wisdom goeth from end to end mightily, and sweetly ordereth all

things." That is its note. That is its crown of glory. By wisdom everything is in its place; everything has its season; everything moves according to settled rhythm; everything can be accounted for in its own time. "The works of the Lord are exceeding good, and whatever He commandeth shall be accomplished in due season. And no man may say, 'What is this? Wherefore is that?' For at time convenient all shall be sought out." "He hath made all things for their use. All things are double, one against another, and He hath made nothing imperfect. One establisheth the good of another." Law, order, cohesion, and purpose—these are the notes of all its action. So this wisdom "entereth into lowly souls and maketh them friends of God" by revealing to them the universe in a co-ordinated scheme, which can only be understood in its entire sum. Each minute detail belongs to the whole, and finds its justification through this coherent relationship. All is allotted, measured, fixed, correlated. Nothing can fall outside this rational intelligence which "remaining one with itself, moveth through all things." Even those things which seem at first sight to be evil have their proper functions and accomplish a true end. So that a man cannot say, "This is worse than that," for in time they will all be approved.

We see how deeply the Jew has laid hold of this scientific realism. And it is important to notice that this ideal of the Uniformity of Law was not a

dream only of special experts and thinkers in their studies, adoring Wisdom as it was known in books, but passed out to become part of the very substance of the popular imagination, so that, in the Psalms sung in public worship, the delight in the fixity and certainty of law breaks out continually where natural causes are under review.

It is good to dwell on this natural characteristic of the Jew. For we know well, in the traditional debates over the evidences for miracles, how we are told that people in old days never looked for God's working in the normal and natural order of things, but were always on the lookout for the strange and the freakish and the sudden and the surprising, as the signals of God's immediate presence.

And, of course, there are historical periods in which human ignorance is utterly at the mercy of marvels ; and there are Lives of the Saints, familiar to us all, which appear to have no conception of what a fact is or of what evidence means. These stories amuse by their childlike simplicity or irritate by their childish silliness, according to the consciousness with which they are written, or the mood in which they are read. They certainly cannot count for proof of anything except of a state of mind which imagines that the further you get from reality, the nearer you get to God. But at any rate this temper is in absolute contradiction with all the deep and serious teaching of the Old Testament. What we see there is that the more the Jew

came to himself, the more he purged himself of this heathen delight in all that was mythical and marvellous. As his Scripture grew, it shook off this glamorous coil of fable. And more and more decisively it struck its own note of admiration and praise for the work of God in the world of Nature. It looked out at the world with clear eyes and a joyful amazement; and what it detected above all else, as typical and characteristic of God's manifestation in Nature, was the unqualified security of law. "Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and they abide." That is the glory of it. "O Lord, Thy Word abideth for ever in heaven." "They continue this day according to Thine ordinance, for all things serve Thee." "He hath made them fast for ever and ever. He hath given them a law which cannot be broken." "Thou hast set the waters bounds which they cannot pass, nor turn again to cover the earth." A law which cannot be broken; bounds which cannot be passed. These are the signals by which God is known. This is the Divine hall-mark. Those Bible writers gloried in the sense of measure, of certainty, of proportion, of limit, of regularity, of stability, which the spectacle of Nature's drama reiterated before their eyes from generation to generation. Especially they loved and recognised the punctuality of every natural operation—the punctuality of stars in their fixed circles; "He telleth the number of stars, and calleth them all by their names"—the punctuality

of morning and evening, of seed-time and harvest, of winter and summer, of sun and moon. These would never fail. On these man might ever count and depend, as the very type of orderly and persistent and enduring recurrence. On their regularity of return he could frame his days and build up a coherent system. "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season."

"In due season," in fit places, by rule, at certified times, according to a sure measure, with punctual security of purpose, under set and known limitations—so everything in Nature was done. So the strong heavens and the enduring mountains proclaimed—the mountains which are the type of the Divine power, just because "they may not be removed, but stand fast for ever." Everything in its own order. That was the message which spoke to them out of the face of Nature, and, in the thrill of so recognising it, they sang of the moon appointed for certain seasons, and of the sun that knoweth his going down; of springs which run, in ordained channels, among the hills; of beasts that know where and when to find in them their drink; of birds that build in the branches made for the purpose; and of fir-trees allotted to the stork; and high hills made fit for wild goats to find refuge in; and stony rocks where the rabbits may burrow. The night with its kindly covering is the signal to the lions that it is now their time to find food; and,

as the morning sun arises, the wild beast is withdrawn to his proper lair. His part is done; "he lays him down in his den." Another takes up the rôle. For lo! at his own true hour, in obedience to the punctual call, moving into his place in the rhythmic scene, man steps out to his appointed task, and fulfils his allotted labour, until the hour strikes for his daily release, and the evening summons him home. Ah! the superb splendour of this unchanging scene; of this drama rehearsed in unbroken sequences, age after age, in tireless regularity! And this purpose was not merely utilitarian. True, the primary form in which purpose begins to be recognised by the Jew, as by the Greek, was in the adaptation of things for use, and especially for human use. But the Jew's admiration does not in the least arrest itself on this narrow ground. It recognises Divine purpose in the very existence of Law as such. It gives praise to God for the law by which all things live. Merely in being what they are, they praise Him—merely by performing their true function, according to their place in the entire scheme. So fire and heat, snow and vapour, praise Him, by being fire and heat, snow and vapour. So wind and storm praise Him, in no other sense than that they fulfil His Word. "Let them praise the Name of the Lord" for this one reason that "He spake the word and they were made; He commanded and they were created." They took natural form; they were fashioned in obedience to a certain

law. Let them live according to the law, and by so living they sing His praise. So the great hymn *Benedicite* asserts. It calls upon all natural things to be themselves; and, by virtue of so acting, Nature, speaking through man, her true and appointed priest, constitutes one consummate chorus.

Now, how did a whole people arrive, two or three thousand years ago, at a conclusion which we proudly imagine to be the peculiar truth which physical science has in our own day slowly and with difficulty begun to compel us to acknowledge? How did they succeed in this surprising intellectual feat? Well, the process of their arrival is as interesting as the conclusion reached. For they came to it from an ethical major premise. First, they had laid hold, tight and fast, on the ideal of God as a God of righteousness; and by righteousness they meant rectitude. He was a God Who kept His Word, a God on Whom man could rely, a God Who was faithful and sure, a God with Whom was no change, neither shadow of turning, a God Who was no mere man that he should repent, a God Who could be counted upon to abide steadfast to His covenant and promise that He made to a thousand generations, a God of moral purpose, bent on a far-off end that He would most certainly achieve. This was the God of Israel, the God Whose counsels stand firm like strong mountains, and Whose judgments never swerve, the God of eternal purpose, of deliberate intention, of invin-

cible will, the High God inhabiting eternity, Who would, without fail, carry His work through to the end, "because He is One Who can never faint or grow weary." Such was their faith; and how easy, how natural the transition from this moral conception of God to the God Whom Nature revealed to them! "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." That was the text that carried them over from the ethical to the physical world. They searched for corroboration in Nature of their trust in a God of Righteousness, and found the evidence for Him in all those deep foundations of the earth which never shook—in the mountains, that stood rooted and could never be removed; in that great deep, which knew no defect of time or change; in those stars, which came and went in their unbroken succession; in these untiring recurrences of days and seasons and years, by which, in the unutterable silence of the heavens, "one day telleth another, and one night certifieth another;" in the fixed and sure order which set everything its bounds, and "meted out the water by measure and made a weight for the winds, a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning, and ordained the path that the wild fowl knoweth, and set a bridle on Leviathan, to turn him whither he would." That was the God Whom they knew already, and loved and adored in the heart of their worship, and Who showed Himself as the Master of their souls in that school of delightful discipline of which the

statutes and commandments, testimonies and laws, were as honey on the mouth, and dearer than gold and silver. This God of their spiritual life was the very same whom they now recognised over all this wide face of earth and sky. Therefore they revelled in the perfection of law, so old, so unvarying, so minute. "In wisdom has He made all." God Himself will challenge man to contemplate this eternal order of His in Nature. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth?" "Who determined the measures of it, or who stretched the line upon it? Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner-stone thereof? Who shut up the sea in bars? And provided for darkness a decree, and set bars and doors? Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bonds of Orion? Knowest thou the ordinances of the heaven? Canst thou number the clouds by wisdom?" So the splendid taunt is flung into the ear of Job until he lays his hand upon his mouth overwhelmed by a glory of a God who reveals Himself through the minute carefulness of natural law.

And it will be seen that, though the Jew arrives at this dominant conception of the law through his ethical interest, he did not play the pathetic fallacy, and try to force moral purposes upon Nature, and turn her into a didactic allegory. No; it was rather that he found in law as such the equivalent

in Nature to that which showed itself as moral law in the area of human conduct. Moral law was man's own peculiar prerogative. "The fear of the Lord"—that is his own special form of the wisdom which weighed the winds in a measure. "To depart from evil"—that is the special form by which he partakes in the understanding which decrees a way for the rain. For things outside man it was enough to exist. Simply the fact that they obeyed a law of their being, which made them what they were and allotted them a place and function in an ordered whole, constituted their glory. By this they gave their praise. The mere fixity of the decree which governed and ordained their activities was that in them which corresponded to the rectitude characteristic of God, and demanded by God from man. Laws in Nature corresponded to duty in man without any confusion or mingling of the term, according to the same high feeling that made Wordsworth, in the very spirit of the Jew, recognise the reflection of duty in that which "preserved the stars from wrong, and kept the most ancient heaven fresh and strong."

We can see this very transition made, in its most winning and effective form, in that memorable psalm which chants the praise of the sun in the heavens in the same breath in which it sings the glory of the law of the Lord converting the soul. "Two worlds are ours," so it seems to say. And both are one, for each is akin to the other, and

releases the other's secret—each delivers one message. As your eyes travel from one to the other, you feel no breach. You are facing ever one identical type of Being. Out there, in the wide spaces, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." And they declare it by sheer force of punctual uniformity—"One day telleth another, and one night certifieth another." In the regular and rhythmic certification lies the glory of God. This certification goes on in silence; it needs no ulterior word, for it speaks of itself, by the soundless certainty of its unbroken record. "There is neither speech nor language; but their voices are heard among them." And supreme in all the moving drama is the great untiring sun, which rises out of its appointed tabernacle and travels "forth from the uttermost part of the heavens and runneth about unto the end of it again." Watch it, searching all hidden things, obedient to its set purpose. Watch it, and as you watch it you have passed into the other world within, which repeats in its own moral necessities the cadences of that Eternal Order which keeps heaven and earth in their place. "The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple." "The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether." Such was the Jew; such was the temper of the Old Covenant.

Now what I desire you to recognise and consider is that this is the moral and spiritual background out of which emerges the record of the wonder-work attributed to Jesus Christ our Lord. Every believer in the power of His Name to heal the sick or raise the dead came to that belief through his absolute reliance in a God of faith and fixity and order, manifested in the majestic uniformity of Nature and in the unswerving vigour of the moral law. This was the common conviction of every religious Jew; and it was the religious Jews who, mainly, came to Christ.

And not only had each disciple of the Lord already held this belief with passion and with joy, and sung it out in psalms of thoughtful adoration, but also he had, at the moment of our Lord's appearing, verified his confidence in this God Who knows no change nor shadow of turning under a very severe test. For he had passed under a tremendous spiritual experience; he had been swept by the impetus of a large religious revival. He had found himself mastered by the sway of a dominant personality whom he had thought to be the very Christ. Every believer in Jesus had first been in the grip of the Baptist; he had been shaken as a reed in the wind by the overpowering force of that amazing voice. Surely, if ever there was a nucleus round which imagination would weave its spells of wonder it was to be found in the lean, brown figure fed on the wild food of the land, clad

in rough goat's hair, delivering his message of thunder and storm, until the entire heart of a people bent and broke under its stress. Surely here, if ever, legends and miracles would spontaneously express the wrought tension of a multitudinous emotion. Yet there was not one such story told of him. And when, long after, our Lord took His followers to recover their trembling faith back to the old familiar places that were still alive with the vivid memories of that revival by Jordan, their verdict, as they recalled their old emotion, was summed up in a phrase, "John did no miracle." He was wonderful; he held our souls in his hand; he appeared to us to be the Messiah come at last. And all was true that he said. Yet we never heard of any deed of power ascribed to him. "John did no miracle."

This was the Jew's mind at our Lord's coming—so sane and steadfast and actual. How ludicrous, then, to assume that his case can be matched with mediæval superstitions about St. Thomas of Canterbury, or that his state of mind corresponds to the glamorous and untrammelled imagination of a Hindu! How unhistorical to imagine that he would be sure to find it natural to throw out his spiritual excitement in the form of legend and miracle! How desperately against the facts it is to suppose that he, the Jew, sought for evidence of God in the abnormal because he could not find it in the normal, or wanted a breach in Nature for

God to look through! On the contrary, his whole religion was bound up in a God manifested through law, of Whose mind and goodness and pity normal and fixed Nature was the direct and unceasing expression.

But why, then, did the Jew who so utterly believed in the normal and the natural come to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Why did this very same man who asked of John the Baptist no miracle find it natural and obvious and indubitable that Jesus Christ should do mighty works? Why this difference? There must be some reason to account for it. The Hindu, the mediævalist, do not understand what they are about when they spin their magic tales for the relief of their childish enthusiasm. They have never known what a fact means. They have never believed in history. They have never thought of God identifying His purpose with actual historical facts, with the real events of a rational story. But the Jew has done and known all this. For him fact is Divine. God is seen at work in history as in Nature. Natural science is his Gospel. How, then, does he hold with the record of the Virgin Birth and the empty tomb? That is what we have got to explain.

Here is a man who believes that God can never change. Why, out of that very belief, does he go on to ascribe to Him a convulsion which changed the entire life of Humanity? Here is a man who

relies on the inflexible Will of a God Who will by no means clear the guilty. Why, out of the heart of the reliance, does he come to look to the same God to cancel the doom which the past has made inevitable—to reverse the order which history has imposed? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That is the inexorable verdict of the Divine Judge. Yet now this Jew of the Mosaic Covenant declares that the Judge Himself saves the sinner, through the death that He is doomed to die, from the judgment that He has Himself pronounced.

There must have been some strong, valid, adequate reason at work upon him to explain this momentous change in his idea of what God would do. That is the reason that we have got to find; and, when we look for it we find it, I would plead, in the spiritual discoveries to which his very loyalty to the God of law had brought him. The Jew had praised the Divine character of unswerving law until it had defeated itself. If the normal and the fixed and the legal were the final determination and standard by which man was to be taught, then his spiritual experience told him he was shut fast in prison. He was self-convicted. He was dead. Who could deliver him from the sentence of death? He himself was powerless. If there is nothing but the Covenant of Obedience to stand between God and his soul, then he is lost. Surely then the law could not be God's last Word. Something that went beyond law was wanted to outdo

the fatal consequences of past action. The law was just and good and holy; but it slew. Therefore a new Word was wanted to carry forward, on to a fresh level, the work of the old Word which had come to arrest. The new was not in contradiction with the old, for it was its needful issue. The old demanded the new. The normal cried out for the exceptional. Human nature had been driven to expect an arrival which would lift it to a new plane of being. It is all to be done by Him Who comes not to destroy, but to fulfil. He fulfils. Yes; but He fulfils not by a merely natural growth from within, but by an act which no natural man could have achieved. He stands absolutely alone in the doing of it. There is no other with whom to compare Him. Not even the greatest of the inspired men, not even John the Baptist!

And therefore, while John, who brought no new power into play and could not save and deliver, did no miracle, this Jesus Christ, Who enables a man to be born again as from his mother's womb, stands wholly apart in His unique significance, and has power to change and transfigure humanity by His Presence in its flesh. He is not one Man among many, however exalted. He is the only Man, the New Man, the first creation of a purged and regenerate humanity. He breaks the yoke of the traditional and hereditary sin. He makes an utterly original beginning. Therefore we cannot be surprised if His birth is not as other births. He

throws into His human nature the full force of His sinlessness, and therefore we cannot be surprised if it is impossible that He should be born of death or that His flesh shall see corruption. We have no measure or standard of the power which a sinless humanity would be able to put out over its fellows ; the facts recorded for us by those with whom Jesus came in contact are our only evidence of what it would mean. But these facts fall very naturally into place, if it be true that the only man whose faculties sin has never curtailed or thwarted is in activity upon the scene. These activities, these wonders are all human and natural. Yes ; but by this we mean human and natural under the terms of a sinless manhood and of a Divine Indwelling. They are the inevitable effects, in and on our human nature, if once it has been raised to a higher power than any of which we can, by ourselves, have had experience. They are the signs that our nature has been changed from what it is in us, with our maimed capacities and our lowered vitality on which sin has worked its degradation. It has been born again into newness of life, and it cannot but be transformed into novel potencies and endowed with efficacy beyond all that our experience can anticipate. And just in this transformation lies our redemption, our salvation. If Jesus Christ had been nothing more than we are, we should not be saved by His coming. He would have left us where we were. It was because He was so different that

we can in Him be changed. It is because He, by living and dying, did a deed which He alone and no other could do that therefore He rose from the dead and enabled us to rise with Him.

The Incarnation, then, does not gain in true value by being stripped of all that is exceptional or more than normal. It is itself, from end to end, exceptional and more than normal; and only by virtue of being so can it be our redemption. Christ comes into the flesh in order to change all that the flesh has, by our sin, come to mean to us. A changed nature is the very secret and heart of His offer. Therefore the signs and signals of a wonderful and unprecedented change accompany, inevitably, His coming. No one else, by dying, could redeem the whole world; and therefore His Death stands wholly alone, in its character and in its result. No one but He could have been so raised from the dead. Redemption is the purpose of the Incarnation; and the Incarnation therefore itself is misunderstood if it does not force us to translate all that human nature has normally been to us into the new terms of a redeemed life. "Behold, old things have passed away, old things now become new." That is the significance of Christ Incarnate. And that which we call "miraculous" is the effect and the proof of this newness in our manhood. Miracle is the outward reflex of the new redemption. It reveals to us what the old facts come to under the new conditions.

Fact! That is the key-word which still always binds together Christianity and science. Both stand absolutely on facts, on experience. For a religious appeal is not primarily to logic or to theory, or to metaphysic, but to facts—facts of immediate human feeling, facts of personal experimental value, facts of human and shared experiences. It simply declares that certain things happen; certain events take place. Religion is an experience which it challenges science to deny. And if its experience reports facts which go beyond the normal, if it claims to offer evidence that the facts classified as natural are not ultimate in their normal condition, but are susceptible of a further transposition carrying them to novel issues, then it does this only because the Divine Wisdom, which it recognises in the disclosures of science, suggests and accounts for the new step to be taken. It is one coherent and consistent God Who reaches from end to end mightily. He it is Who creates; and He it is Who then re-creates His own creation. He Who laid down the conditions of human birth Himself carries on these conditions to the level at which the New Man can appear Who was born of a Virgin's womb. He Who had made death made also the resurrection of the dead. There is continuity of purpose that holds good throughout as the process runs from stage to stage. By recognising God in Nature we recognise Him in that into which Nature passes as a transfigured thing. The secret of Nature leads

you beyond Nature. Humanity is fulfilled in that which, of itself, it cannot achieve. A total, unique, and final spiritual change, attained by an act done in the flesh, makes our flesh become, under its invading pressure, a new and living way into Eternal Life. That is the Incarnation ; that is the Redemption ; that is the Miracle of Miracles for which all Nature waited and cried and travailed. And the demand for this change, this reversal, this transfiguration issues not from what is low and backward and unintelligent in us, but from out of all that is highest, and purest, and most rational in our inmost being.

SCIENTIFIC NECESSITY AND THE MIRACULOUS

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I

The problem of the nature and extent of the miraculous is not one that can be solved by a critical examination of texts or an impartial weighing of historical evidence alone. It is intimately concerned with philosophical and scientific problems of a wider and more fundamental character. It raises the whole question of the supernatural, and of the limits assignable to human will in its control over natural agencies. And it is unfortunate that neither the critics nor the apologists of Gospel miracles seem as a rule sufficiently to consider the implications of the scientific or philosophical principles upon which, in part at least, they base their arguments. It cannot, I think, be denied that these implications are of far-reaching importance, or that they need to be made explicit—never more perhaps than at a time when theologians, occupied by controversies over disputed texts and documents, tend to lose sight of those wider theological issues with

which their predecessors were chiefly concerned. It is with the hope that attention may be directed to such necessary pre-suppositions of any treatment of the Gospel miracles—pre-suppositions insufficiently examined, as it appears to me, in Mr. Thompson's recent book—that the following pages have been written.

It was the misfortune of the older school of Christian apologists that in their attempt to establish the possibility of the Gospel miracles they proved too much. Mozley, for example, in his Bampton Lectures, had no difficulty in showing that upon the theory of natural necessity and causation upheld by Hume, Mill, and the chief antagonists of the miraculous, miracles were not only possible, but in a certain sense necessary. If the belief in natural law and universal world-order has no real justification, but is in truth merely a mental habit engendered by customary association and the frequent repetition of similar sequences of events, there can be produced no compelling evidence why these sequences should not be broken. Upon this supposition the order of events exhibits no true necessity, is in fact miraculous, if by the miraculous be understood what is wholly fortuitous and inexplicable. The extent of human experience is so restricted, especially with respect to those natural events which are such as can come under direct observation, that, if the only evidence for necessity be empirical, the limits which can be

assigned to the possibility of interruptions or direct contradictions of those natural uniformities in which men place their confidence must be entirely arbitrary. The mere repetition of a sequence of natural events can as such provide no guarantee of its continuance. For such sequences must be limited to events which have fallen within recorded experience, and the duration of such experiences, however long continuing, is not of itself sufficient to afford grounds for determining what experiences of a different or even contradictory character have or have not occurred (though unrecorded) in the past, or are capable of occurring in the future. If actual experience be the only test of the reality of any natural event, or, putting it in another way, if the only evidence for an event's occurrence be a certain impression produced upon the mind of one or a number of observers, then the fact that certain witnesses (leaving on one side the question of their credibility) asserted the occurrence within their experience of a miraculous event provides of itself the same amount of evidence for the event's actual occurrence as can be adduced for any other event within the natural and normal order. As T. H. Green justly remarks, "Hume's only consistent way of attacking miracles would have been to show that the events in question as miraculous had never been believed."

It is clear, however, that acceptance of Hume's conclusions with regard to natural laws and uni-

formities, while it might seem to provide a reasonable basis for a belief in miracles, would lead to highly dangerous consequences in other regions of theology. For to save the miraculous at the expense of a belief in rational necessity is a hazardous proceeding. If the natural uniformities observed by science, if the very conception of necessity upon which all argument is based, be the product of associations which are purely arbitrary, how will it be possible to preserve a belief in a Divine order or a rational government of the world ? Theology, equally with natural science, involves a belief in Universal Causation, it postulates "necessary" thought. Hume's criticism struck at the very foundations of logical reasoning. It was fatal, if true, to all branches of human speculation. It is consequently not surprising to find that philosophical theologians have allied themselves not to the empirical and materialistic schools of thought which start from and accept the premisses of Hume and Mill, but to those idealistic thinkers who have proved their severest critics. The presuppositions of Mozley's apologetic are to a large extent discredited.

II

The problem that emerges is of a somewhat different character. It may briefly be described as how to reconcile a belief in the reality of necessity

and natural law with a belief also in the reality of events which seem to involve a breach in Nature's uniformities. The general tendency of modern apologists is no longer to regard the miraculous character of certain events recorded in the Gospels as the chief evidence for the truth of the Incarnation or of the Divinity of our Lord. The tendency is rather to appeal to other evidences of our Lord's Divinity in order that the possibility of the recorded miracles may become more credible. Miracles are, it is argued, the natural expression of a Divine Will, but the Divine Will manifests itself equally in the orderly course of Nature—it is only in special circumstances that it shows itself in such a striking way. And it is probable that modern apologists feel that they best achieve their purpose not by the heightening of the arbitrary, inexplicable, and incomprehensible elements in the miraculous, but by the exhibition of its spiritual significance or the rational purpose which renders in some degree intelligible what might otherwise have seemed an empty and unmeaning work of wonder. If by the miraculous be meant an absolute contradiction of the uniformity of Nature, the possibility of the miraculous is literally unthinkable, and the contention that miracles have happened, or can happen, is inherently absurd. It is equivalent to the denial of causation altogether. It would be in effect a denial that anything in the world possesses a determinate nature, or that science can discover uni-

versal laws. Even the most violent breaches of the continuity of natural processes involve, if and when they happen, a recognised order of events in existence before the interruption occurs and resumed after the interruption is over.

Nothing can be called miraculous where anything may happen. Has not Gibbon somewhere a sardonic footnote to the effect that miracles became so common among a certain community of early Christian disciples that they usurped the position of the orderly course of Nature, and for an event to happen according to man's ordinary expectation was in truth a miracle? Nevertheless, the belief that laws or causes, when discoverable, can admit of no exception, can of itself provide no principle by means of which it is possible to determine whether a particular asserted uniformity is an instance of universal law. And scientific observers become more and more chary of dogmatically claiming for their principles of explanation or description the dignity of universal and inviolable law. Arguments based ultimately upon the discoveries of molecular physics which were once used without hesitation within the regions of life and growth and consciousness are now seen to be no longer applicable. The existence of human free-will which was at one time commonly regarded as an hypothesis not worth consideration on account of its apparent conflict with the mechanical explanation of the world is now treated as at least a possi-

bility to be reckoned with, not inherently absurd. It is no longer commonly held that human volition as a power of real initiation involves a breach of the principles of the conservation of energy. The mechanical system of explanation is seen to be valid only within a narrowly limited sphere of application, and to hold good only of substances possessing a determinate and ascertainable nature which change in accordance with mathematically calculable law. Into the nature of the causes which actually determine physical changes it can provide no real insight. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that the self-evident necessity which is the distinguishing characteristic of the laws of mathematics is wholly different from the regularity and uniformity which experience discovers in the processes of physical change. That a triangle while remaining a triangle should behave like a circle is literally unthinkable. But we find no such self-evident and unconditional necessity in the laws which determine the occurrence of physical events within the temporal order. It is even frankly admitted by some distinguished men of science that purely physical changes are possible for which no physical cause can be assigned. Others again are inclined to reverse the former procedure of science, and to find in the processes of life and growth and consciousness (processes admittedly incapable of mechanical explanation) initiating agencies which are ultimately operative even in

the purely physical and inorganic world. Into these questions it is not necessary to enter. Perhaps to point to them will be sufficient evidence for the argument that if the unconditional laws of science are reducible in the last resort to the self-evident laws of mathematics, the existence of the miraculous need involve no breach of their continuity—it contradicts no necessary and inviolable law of mind. Ability to control Nature, insight into the working of natural processes, the determination and the self-control necessary to produce by the necessary means a desired result—these all vary in different individuals and differ in degree. The natural processes in accordance with which, by the help of which, the desired result is achieved are known very imperfectly; the actual method by which human volition controls the physical order—the relation existing between mind and matter—is in a certain sense not known at all. If our inability to explain a natural event is sufficient to justify us in calling it miraculous, then miracles confront us at every moment of our lives.

But what really enables us to call, for instance, some of the mighty works recorded in the Gospels miraculous is the fact that they seem to testify in Him who wrought them to a power over Nature not greater only in degree than the ability or insight possessed by this or that individual, but greater than any which humanity has elsewhere known. Such a power may not necessarily differ in kind

from the power possessed by ordinary human wills. For that power, too, is in truth miraculous. We can, moreover, assign no limits to the possibilities of human knowledge or the potentialities of human energy. Nor do we know what addition to human capacity in controlling Nature might be brought by an advance towards perfect goodness. But in proportion as the power displayed is truly miraculous, it must always pass beyond men's present comprehension—it is not wholly intelligible in the light of present knowledge. Yet to hold such an opinion is not to be committed to the belief that the miraculous is wholly unintelligible and irrational —that it is possible to discover no reason for an event of whose ultimate explanation we must still confess our ignorance. We are unable to discover or to state the relation existing between mind and matter, between cerebral processes and the conscious life which seems to control them. We can see no unconditional necessity in the causes, physical or spiritual, by which changes in the temporal order are initiated. Yet this inability is no bar to men's use in their efforts to find reasons for physical events of the categories of natural science, or of concepts derived, wholly or in part, from their experience of the conscious life of morality. Purpose, design, volition, desire to satisfy a spiritual longing, motives of greed or selfishness or ambition, the impelling force of patriotism or love or religion —it is in influences such as these that men look

for the reasons of effects in the physical order, startling or insignificant, produced by human will. Concerning the ultimate modes or methods by means of which will produces its results, they are obliged to confess their ignorance—that the final explanation is not one which can ignore the categories of morality they feel assured. It is because of this fact that the new light thrown by modern criticism upon the spiritual and religious significance of many of the miracles recorded in the Gospels derives its force. It can in no sense prove the actual occurrence of the events which it illuminates. It can never provide a final explanation any more than the belief that the world as a whole exhibits design or purpose is of itself sufficient to absolve men from the patient exploration of Nature's secret processes, or the effort to find new evidences of design. But in proportion as miracles cease to be empty wonders they become increasingly more and more intelligible. And if their occurrence be granted, and the spiritual motive which led to their production be clearly apparent, the difference between a miracle and an ordinary event produced by human volition and due to human motives is again a difference principally of degree.

III

One reason why I find Mr. J. M. Thompson's recent book on *Miracles in the New Testament* unsatisfactory is because these and other philosophical

considerations, which should surely be preliminary to any serious criticism of the Gospel miracles, receive such scanty treatment.

The definition of a miracle which Mr. Thompson accepts (quoted from Murray's *English Dictionary*) is in many respects unfortunate—it would not, I think, be accepted by any prudent apologist as an adequate definition of the meaning of the word miracle as applied to the supernatural events recorded in the Gospels. A miracle is described in the first portion of the definition as "a marvellous event occurring within human experience which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency." [1] Yet the doctrine that we know the limits of human power, and can decide what is or is not possible by the aid of greater insight into the operations of natural agencies, is contradicted by every fresh advance of science, by every new achievement in man's effort to control and triumph over the material world. And given the hypothesis of the Incarnation, is it really possible for Theology to determine that our Lord's power to mould natural forces to His purpose was not really human, or that the effects which he produced within the physical order were in no sense due to the co-operation of the agencies of Nature? Mr. Thompson's further explanation of the meaning of Murray's definition does not help in my opinion to make his position clearer.

[1] *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 1.

He emphasises, and quite rightly, the importance of recognising the fact that the meaning of the miraculous depends upon a contrast between the normal and the abnormal, the ordinary and the exceptional. But he goes on to argue that the belief in miracles is more than the recognition of this contrast. The scientist, he says, explains miracles as "instances of natural laws which cannot be formulated yet, but which will be formulated some day. But the believer in miracles explains them as due to the special intervention of a supernatural agency which can never be formulated scientifically."[1] What Mr. Thompson understands by "supernatural" is not made clear; but if what is at present insusceptible of scientific formulation is thereby miraculous, then we are familiar with such miracles in all our daily lives. For if man possesses a power of real initiation in the temporal order of the physical world (and without such power morality becomes unmeaning and responsibility a delusion) the influence which he exerts upon that order is in truth insusceptible of scientific explanation. To assert the contrary would be to deny the reality of human freedom. And consequently, when Mr. Thompson states what he considers to be the real problem—the problem to which his book provides a negative answer—namely, "whether any events have, as a matter of fact, occurred within human experience which cannot be explained in

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

terms of the laws of Nature as at present conceived," [1] the answer which he gives ignores the facts. For the physical events which science formulates are in no sense explained by the descriptive "laws" which are the result of scientific thought. Experience tells us that substances change in a certain order and in obedience to certain rules. But we have no real insight into the nature of the necessity which governs the changing series of physical changes, nor have we any satisfying answer to the question how these changes are produced. And we have in our experience of changes initiated by human volition a fact which is literally incapable of scientific formulation, which cannot even be described in scientific terms.

I cannot avoid the conclusion that Mr. Thompson has no definite and consistent view as to the meaning of words such as "uniformity" or "law" of Nature. He speaks of miracles "breaking" the laws of Nature, and the whole tendency of his criticism is to regard such an occurrence as impossible. Yet he is quite prepared to admit (following Dr. Rashdall) that the uniformity of Nature is a postulate of scientific method, not a necessity of thought. And yet, as has been argued above, to believe that Nature is not uniform, to believe, for instance, that nothing possesses a determinate nature, is to deny the possibility of thinking, is, in fact, to commit that intellectual suicide which, according to Mr.

[1] *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 5.

Thompson, is "in practice" the fate of those who admit a miracle. He states in his concluding pages, somewhat curtly, that miracles are rejected by common sense. Yet he refuses to discuss the question whether miracles are to be regarded as instances of natural laws hitherto unknown—a discussion which might do much to remove those very objections which "common sense" is apt to urge against the miraculous.

Again, his whole view as to the admissibility or inadmissibility of *à priori* evidence within historical inquiries seems to me to require much further consideration than he is prepared to allow. He states, on the one hand, that "no *à priori* principle, either as to the possibility or as to the probability of miracles, need divert us from the straight path of the evidential inquiry," [1] and he is emphatic that no historical inquirer ought to allow a desire to prove a particular theory to affect his judgment of historical truth. Yet it would not be difficult, I think, to show that Mr. Thompson's whole treatment of a particularly difficult problem has been affected by his belief that the miraculous is in some way contrary to human reason, and more orthodox critics will certainly think that his treatment of critical and textual problems has been biassed by a desire to prove a particular theory. On the other hand, he is prepared to admit that *à priori* presuppositions may legitimately affect the question of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

evidence in two ways only — by disposing us to demand more or less evidence for the alleged historical events, or "if they were present in the minds of the witnesses to the miracle and influenced the form of their evidence."[1] And this position seems to me directly contrary to the position previously maintained. I am unable to perceive a clear distinction between a disposition to demand more or less evidence for an alleged historical event and a disposition to be biassed by a desire to prove a particular theory. The facts cannot be so dissociated from the theory, nor the evidence from the *à priori* assumptions as to the nature of the events.

Finally, another chief reason why I find Mr. Thompson's book unsatisfactory is because I find in its pages no sufficient evidence that he has ever really weighed and considered the conclusions which the complete rejection of the miraculous as an element in the Christian religion must necessarily involve. The constructive portion of Mr. Thompson's book (though he emphasises its importance) is extremely short, and the conclusions, other than critical, which he reaches are stated dogmatically with but little attempt at justification. In criticising them I may therefore be doing Mr. Thompson an injustice. Mr. Thompson seems to think that the religious importance of the events recorded in the Gospels can be determined quite independently of historical investigation. "Provided only that

[1] *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 7.

faith does not dispute the verdict of reason that such-and-such were the historical facts, it is free to maintain and can prove itself right in maintaining that such-and-such is their religious significance." [1] And he seems to look forward to a time when religious hearts and minds will find all the natural laws and processes investigated by science equally supernatural. He quotes a passage from Eucken—"With good reason did our greatest poet call miracle the dearest child of faith. A religion entirely devoid of it is a self-contradiction. The only question is what we are to understand by it." And he continues: "The answer is, we are to understand this element in our faith as unlimited supernaturalism, without miracles." [2]

I must confess that the prospect of unlimited supernaturalism fills me with dismay. It may mean a supernaturalism unlimited by the trammels of historical Christianity. It opens the door to Pantheistic doctrines of Divine Immanence, and leaves room for all the vagaries of religious emotion based solely upon individual and personal experience. And when Mr. Thompson tells us in a later passage that "we have still to assimilate the idea of the identity of our Lord's moral nature with ours, which somehow underlies the reality of His temptation," [3] I feel cause for still greater apprehension. Christianity has hitherto maintained that it is at once the duty and the privilege of Christian be-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 212. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 3. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

lievers to endeavour to assimilate their moral natures to the Divine example of perfect goodness afforded by their Master. But if not only our Lord's moral, intellectual, and physical nature, but human nature in its entirety, must henceforward be interpreted as being subject at once to natural laws in their present interpretation, and to the moral and other limitations of humanity at human nature's present level of development, the Christian religion becomes a religion of despair. The Christian belief in the miraculous, quite apart from the evidence for or against particular miracles, has always represented a particular view of the relation existing between God and the universe, between spiritual forces and the world of matter. It has testified to the belief that the human spirit is not wholly subservient to those physical forces which are in truth its instruments; that the human will can rise superior to and triumph over matter. Implicit and involved in it is the idea that the scientific interpretation of the world is neither ultimately true nor final, and that the conclusions of moral and spiritual insight can never be disregarded in men's final estimate of things. For some minds the evidence of the Divine government of the world will be found principally in recorded instances which transcend though they do not contradict human experience, and these will perhaps attach undue importance to all that is at present unintelligible and abnormal in the legacy of fact and history enshrined in the Christian tradition.

Others, again, will chiefly emphasise the spiritual significance and moral supremacy of our Lord's life and character. Though they will not necessarily reject, on account of its present incomplete intelligibility, the element of miracle, they will welcome any light that may be thrown by psychology, by criticism, by the comparative study of religion upon the facts recorded. But if the Gospel miracles are to be considered fairly, it will be necessary to reflect deeply upon the scientific and philosophical problems involved in any consideration of the miraculous. We must make up our minds upon the meaning of miracle; the part which the miraculous as distinct from the wholly irrational and unintelligible plays within our ordinary experience; and its possibility within the natural order and the extent to which divergence from the normal and customary modes of natural operation may, on special occasions and for special purposes, become in part intelligible. We must further be prepared to face and state the consequences to our theory of the relation between the human and the Divine, the natural and the supernatural, which the complete rejection of the element of miracle involves.

Upon none of these problems can I find in Mr. Thompson's pages a satisfactory and coherent view.

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

SERMON BY DR. H. S. HOLLAND

Preached before the University of Oxford

"That I might know Him, Jesus Christ, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead."—PHIL. iii. 10, 11.

THE life of Jesus had totally failed to establish a faith which could survive His death. True, He had spoken as no man had ever yet spoken. He had gone about doing good. He had done many mighty works. So the records assert. The blind had learned to see, the deaf to hear; the lepers had been cleansed; the dead had been raised; the poor had the Gospel preached to them. He had swayed the hearts of the people. They had followed in crowds that could not be shaken off. They had been ready to make Him a King. They would have done anything in the world for Him. That voice of His had gone home to their very life. Those eyes of His had read the secrets of their souls. That wonderful teaching had absorbed and enthralled. That perfect example had fascinated. Had there ever been anything on this earth of ours to compare with His Presence? And then

those twelve intimate friends who had gone in and out with Him since the days that John was put in prison! They had given themselves utterly away to Him; they had no other stay—"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life." That was the word which said everything that was in their heart of hearts. There was no one like Him. They had but one thought—how to live for His Name; and but one desire—how to die in His cause. So it had been during His stay among them.

Yet all this went for nothing under the crash of the Cross. The crowd that had once followed Him whithersoever He went had seen Him hung on a tree, reviled as a malefactor, powerless to save Himself, unable to meet the damning taunt, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross and we will believe." The friends lay hidden in a dark chamber, close shut for fear, and buried in a black despair. They had trusted; they could trust no more. Every hope was blotted out. All was gone. They lay dumb, stunned, dead. Their vision had vanished as a dream. They had no light, no word, no insight of faith. Nothing was left them but to cover their heads and let the great wave of sorrow pass over them.

Now, that was the end of the Lord's life on earth. It is only made the more striking by dwelling on the fascination and beauty of His personal presence among us. No doubt in those few crowded months of His Mission He had flung out force which still,

through its recorded words and acts, moves the world. But all the more urgent is it to recognise that, in spite of what it was, it did not suffice. The movement so begun simply broke and died; and, by so breaking, it confessed that in and by itself it had given men no intelligible hold on life which could stand the shock of the ultimate disaster. It had not interpreted Jesus to His friends in a way that would give them mastery over their fate. It had not lifted them on to a plane from which they could rise more than conquerors over "Death and thee, O Time." It had not put them in possession of the Divine secret. It had not given them a Gospel which they could believe as the word of truth, in the face of all that the world could do to spoil and defeat. It had not verified for them the eternal righteousness and love of God. Far from it! It had shattered their spiritual nerve. It had left them barren, baffled, broken men, carried under by the lapse of a lost cause. So far as the effect of our Lord's earthly life by itself went, that Upper Chamber where the eleven crouched was the end. There was nothing more to come of it—nothing more to be said or done. They could but go home and die.

The impulse, therefore, which constitutes Christianity is not to be found within the four corners of the recorded life on earth. So far as that went, and if that were all, there would be no such thing as Christianity at all. Christianity dates itself from

one event—and one event only—the Resurrection. There alone lies its creative force. It is the Gospel of the Resurrection. That is its primal meaning. All its other elements take there their start. From that they win their value and efficacy. Without it they would have been powerless to create a faith or to deliver a message. The good news which the believer has to declare is that God raised up Jesus Christ from the dead. That is the kernel and key of the whole matter. There is nothing else except what comes out of that, and belongs to that, and is made intelligible by that. The earthly life, with its amazing memories, will now become a new thing. Taken alone it had totally failed to make itself an intelligible interpretation of things; but raised into fresh meaning by the power of the Resurrection it has been made alive into undying significance. It has become a Gospel, a Revelation, which, by itself, it had failed to be. The very Cross and Passion, which had wiped out the meaning of the earthly career and had buried it in a darkness that could be felt, now became, through the illumination of the Resurrection, the seat and centre of the glory in which all light is focussed. Men can preach Christ Crucified, their peace and their joy, only because His Death has been taken up into the Risen Life, and transmuted by its splendour, so that they can be changed from glory to glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The Cross has only power to save as the Cross of the Risen Lord.

The Resurrection, then, is Christianity. From it our religion dates itself. In it lies our whole germinal Gospel. And I would especially call your attention to its illuminative character. It presented itself to the Disciples as the one fact in which the universe arrived at self-interpretation. It was no accidental and detached event that had come merely to relieve their sorrow or to assure them of their Master's safe survival after death. It was no apparition that followed on the other incidents of the Lord's life as a casual appendage. It was no after-vision that might or might not be added to the other memories of His past career. It was not something that could be dropped as possibly doubtful, and yet leave the rest of the story valid and effective. Nay! It had the entire world for its context. It was itself the solution of the whole enigma of life and death. In it the divided pieces of the puzzle of existence all fell together. Everything suddenly became intelligible, coherent, satisfying. A great quiet came over the troubled and perplexed mind. The scene that had been confused and disordered took on, in a moment, the look of something that was understood, the air of a purpose of which it was aware. You might call this Resurrection a wonder, a miracle if you liked; but it was a wonder that at once took its place at the very central heart of things, a miracle that in a moment set a distracted and tangled Nature to rights. For it was the natural world that had

lost its meaning for the men of the Upper Chamber, it was Nature that had landed them in a blind ambuscade; while the Resurrection, far from disturbing the natural sequence of things, had restored order where all had been disordered. It recovered the clues which had been severed. It re-established that confidence in the supremacy of law which had been ruthlessly shattered. The disciples felt as though, under its spell, they had regained their grasp on life, their feet were now on solid earth, their nerve had come back to them, heaven and earth had come together again, and they were changed men. The Resurrection became for them the one fact on which the sum of things depended, the one fact round which the story of humanity turned. It pervaded and possessed their whole mental structure, it showed itself as the one formative, constructive, architectonic conception which governed and controlled their rational interpretation of existence. Thenceforward they thought in terms of the Resurrection. It was the containing principle, the universal synthesis which gave unity to their whole experience and made it a consistent manifestation of the Divine Will. It was impossible for them to imagine anything that fell outside its interpretation. To everything they applied its formula, and always it availed to explain and to justify.

Just consider what it has become in the hands of St. Paul in the Epistles. No doubt he is a master

in dialectic, and he has spent, by the time at which he is writing, years of illuminative thought upon it. But still he is clearly appealing to a language and a mode of thought which are perfectly familiar to his readers and have been long established. We can recognise in this developed and articulated form what it was which had originally transformed the despair of the Upper Chamber into the rapture of the Temple Courts.

First, the Resurrection is, for him and for all, the form under which we now know God. It is our mode of access into His mind. The title by which He is disclosed to us is now "God the Father Who raised Jesus Christ from the dead." By that deed He is known and named; the God in Whom we believe is One Whose character is made manifest in that He raised up Jesus Christ. There is the measure of His Fatherhood, the fulness of His Godhead. All our spiritual life lies in the gradual understanding of what is involved in this supreme act. We are to spend our days in one prolonged effort to enter deeper and deeper into this relation. So the one desire in which the Apostle sums up all that life now means for him is that he shall know more and more of the Resurrection from the Dead, while his one prayer for us is that the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him; that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened, and that

we may know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." This deed of power by which the inheritance is made ours goes back to the primal origin of things in the mystery of the Divine Will which He purposed according to His good pleasure in the dispensation of the fulness of time—so to gather together in one all things in Christ, in Whom we are predestinated "according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." And as it sums up the dispensation of the past, so now it is become our sole mode of approach to the Father. In that one body of His, through which He has abolished the enmity and broken down the wall of partition, and has made in Himself of twain one new man that He might reconcile both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body by the Cross, in which He has been raised to God's right hand in the heavenly places—we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father. So they said, so they understood it.

And as the Resurrection is the one road of access, so again it is the one and only source of all our strength and regeneration. For, through the same "quickening by which God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we, too, who were dead in trespasses and sins hath God quickened together

unto Christ, and hath raised us up together, so that we are His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ unto good works, putting on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. We are risen with Christ, therefore we can seek those things that are above. We are dead with Christ, and, therefore, we can mortify our members which are on the earth. We have put off the old man with his deeds. That is why we do not lie one to another. We have put on a new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him Who created Him. We have been buried with Christ in Baptism into death, that "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we also should walk in newness of life. We are buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also we are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God Who hath raised Him from the dead. For as we have been planted together in the likeness of His Death we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection. If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. In that He died, He died unto sin once. In that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." So we "serve the living and true God, waiting for His Son from Heaven,

Whom He raised from the dead." In this act all the meaning of our service is, once and for all, summed up. And in this belief in the Resurrection we can look forward in hope for all our blessed dead. For "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

We might go on quoting for ever. In the Epistles of St. Paul we cannot travel outside the thought of the Resurrection. In it lies the concentrated consummation of the whole Gospel that he has to deliver. Under it he brings all our being, here and hereafter. It is his philosophy of life, his standard of conduct, his secret of victory. It is for him the keystone in the arch of the Divine manifestation. We are so apt to discuss the Resurrection as if it were a question of one or two temporary apparitions which may or may not be verified on the strength of the evidence at hand. But no sight of a ghost, however well authenticated, would suffice to transfigure man's speculative outlook; to create a new intellectual perspective; to constitute a fresh moment in God's disclosure of His will for man; to read a new meaning into the history of man's development; to solve the enigmas of suffering and sin; to open out fresh resources of power and of regeneration; to declare a purpose which holds good for our entire humanity; to give unity and coherence to the whole creation; to make a creative epoch from which to date an eternal mani-

festation of the Divine energies. Yet this is what the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was; and this is what it did. This is why it changed the Disciples of the Gospels, with their ignorance and childishness and timidity, into the new men of the Acts, with their capacity and their assurance. This is why it availed to transform for them the very roots of their being, the significance of earth, the face of the heavens, their faith in God, their desire for good, their joy in living, their hope of glory.

And why did the Resurrection appear to them to be so charged with meaning? Because it signalised a new energy put out by God on our behalf. Something had been done which altered the conditions under which we lived. God had wrought for us. It is this act of power—novel, original, creational, unique—on which St. Paul is always dwelling. And when you ask how this power has been displayed, the answer always is—that death itself has been transmuted into victory. Death has been forced to take on a new character. It has become, not the sign and proof of our moral conviction, but the organ and the material of our glory. And this because "the body," meaning by that the thing that died, the thing in and through which death does its work, has been brought out through its death into a new existence. It has become the seed of the new manhood. It has been created afresh. It is a new creature. The very flesh in which Christ died has been made the instrument,

the embodiment, the material, of all our living. So they put it. In it He wiped out the story of our shame, the record of our sins. In it He cancelled the evidence of our divisions. In and through it He took up the handwriting of ordinances that were against us and nailed it to a tree. In it, through it, by it, He spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them, openly triumphing over them in it. That which died, by so dying is brought up out of death. By dying it proved that death could not hold it down. This dead thing, this body of humiliation in which the enmity was destroyed, is the very thing by which, raised and glorified, transfigured by the Spirit, we have access to the Father, being "reconciled in the body of His flesh through death," "reconciled in His blood . . . made nigh by the blood of Christ," so that in His Body we may sit in heavenly places where Christ is at the right hand of God.

The Body—there is the word that follows and haunts us everywhere. It is the fixed and persistent term, determining and dominating the whole thought of the Resurrection. It is impossible for St. Paul to touch on the Resurrection without introducing some consequence drawn from the nature of the Body. That is why the entire effect upon humanity of the Risen Christ is seen by the Apostle in the shape of an organism which is His Body. That which He now is, the Church of His on earth becomes. And therefore it wears the form

of a Body ; and all its correlated functions correspond to the relationship between a head and its many members—whether eye or ear or hand or foot. It has joints and bonds, and nourishment ministered ; it grows, compact and articulated by close co-ordination of gifts, unto the edifying of the Body of Christ, until we all come " unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Or, again, the moral and spiritual working of the Resurrection into our lives fulfils itself in our flesh, in our bodies. It cannot rest until it has got to that point. We may be already in possession of the Risen Lord in the Spirit, we may already be " hidden with Christ in God," but we shall still be restless and unfulfilled ; we shall still be expectant of a further change, we shall still be groaning within ourselves, because we have not yet attained to the true and full adoption —" the redemption of our bodies." There lies our true inheritance. That is our pledged promise and consummation. Short of that we are still in travail. We hope on ; we toil on ; we suffer the loss and destruction of the outer man ; we die daily ; we " mortify our members which are upon the earth " ; just because of the glory set before us—the assurance that the Risen Christ, Who is even now our very own in the Spirit, will most certainly, therefore, complete His gracious work in us and raise our bodies into spiritual reality. This result is bound to follow. It is the inevitable outcome of the union

with Christ into which we have already passed. His life is now our life, and therefore it will of sheer necessity reproduce its own character, its own form, its own distinctive effect in us. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Of course the whole of this language is subject to the spiritual transfiguration of which St. Paul lays down the conditions in the Epistle to the Corinthians. But no spiritual transfiguration which it will undergo cancels the real and ideal identity of the Body; so that still it is the organ of expression of all the power which the Risen Christ brings to bear upon us. This identity lies at the base of all the argument concerning the change that passes over it. That which is sown in corruption *is* that which is raised in glory.

And by virtue of this actual identity it does its real and effectual work upon us. It is in that Body in which He endured our death, and, by so enduring it, purged our sin, that He has become our purification. In that Body He suffered and died, and by that suffering and death made suffering and death to become our instruments of redemption, the body of our glory. Therefore it is by this Body, the pledge of death vanquished, that He still wins all His victory; through it He pleads and prevails. This is the meaning of the perpetual phrase, "Re-

demption through the Blood;" "made nigh by the Blood;" "by His own Blood He entered in once into the Holy Place." We find it hard nowadays to put any precise meaning into this historical terminology. Yet, whatever it exactly means, it belongs to the very core of the Faith. It is instinct with its essential life. It speaks from out of its inmost secret. We have not understood the Gospel of Christ unless we can give these words some positive meaning. It may be reconstrued, but it is too near to the centre of things to be abandoned or ignored. It is symbolic, no doubt, but the very symbolism is only possible through the intensity with which the idea of Christ's human Body dominates every presentation of what is expressed by the Resurrection.

And, once again, it is through the glorified Body that we are to hold our uttermost and innermost communion with Him Who is risen. It is His Body once broken, and now transfigured, which is our bond with Him as He is. It is His Blood once poured out, and now alive to plead and to prevail, which works all our sanctification. "Take, eat, this is My Body," "Drink ye all of this: this is My Blood." That is the ultimate moment of that deed of deliverance which God wrought in Christ for us when He raised Him from the dead. That is the crowning act, the mystery whereby we show forth the Lord's death and proclaim His Resurrection. Through the Body in which He died He, by the

Spirit of life, works upon us from out of His place in glory.

You see, then, where we stand—the seriousness of the issue. The belief which made Christianity what it is was belief in the Resurrection, and by that was meant belief in the Risen Body. So alone does the terminology in familiar use become intelligible. So alone can we account for the form taken by Christian thought, for the mould into which its theology ran, for the symbolism which it delighted to employ. It all turns round the central conception of the body raised—the body as the seat and proof of the battle fought and the victory won over death—the body as the instrument through which the victorious life carries out its conquest over death by drawing within its organic structure all redeemed humanity, so that we become one body, fed on the Body and the Blood, made members of one another under one Head, in the one Spirit Which quickeneth all in all.

Forgive me for labouring this matter with much reiteration. But I do earnestly desire to exhibit the actual dominancy of this constructive conception over the entire presentation of the Gospel of Christ as it was originally given to the world, out of the heart of the basic Apostolic witness of those who saw. That is what we have received out of their experience. Christianity started from the Resurrection so understood. There alone lies the original momentum of its Faith.

That is the historical fact for which criticism has to account. It has to explain why this was the idea, and this the language, in which these men embodied that mental and spiritual transformation, which had changed their despair into triumph, their death into life. And, therefore, if you say to me "Give me Calvary! Give me the Love of God perfected, without a touch of miracle, on the Cross; and that is enough," the answer to that plaintive plea of the heart is "In fact, historically, it was not enough." It did not suffice to create the Faith. It did not make manifest to those who saw it the Love of God. Judged by the actual evidence of fact, the Cross blotted out the signs of the love of God. By itself, as the close and consummation of the life on earth, it simply revealed nothing. It was the end of hope and faith. Evil had finally triumphed; God had lost. Men and women, who had clung on desperately to the last, turned away from Calvary with broken hearts to hide themselves in the dust and die.

Only in the light of the Resurrection of the Body which had been slain did Calvary become a Crucifix. Easter, and Easter alone, transformed the death of shame into the symbol of Divine Love perfected through suffering. The fire and force of the act by which God Himself raised that which had died from the dead smote itself back into that dark hour of travail, and so revealed a God Who had wrought, through the suffering and the death, the deed by

which His love was justified in a redeemed humanity raised from death into life. So it actually happened to those who saw the thing done. That was in fact the order of their experience. That unique and tremendous experience of theirs stands as the proof and type of what all human experience is bound to verify. In our day we press the record of the earthly days of Jesus for all that it is worth. We go as far as the critical or historical skill of man will carry us in evoking the personal fascination of a portrait and a presence which can never weary or grow stale. We love to follow the career of the Galilean Master moving through the green hills of Palestine; and never before has the lone sufferer on the Cross wielded a more royal sway over men's imagination. But the record of history is dead against us if we think that we can ever stop at that point. In fact, as so seen, the active life did not disclose the secret of its power; nor will any study of the record do more than the sight of the life itself could do, of which the record is a mere echo. A faith so gained and so arrested holds in it an unsolved enigma; it cannot give vital coherence to itself or to the interpretation of God in the world. Under the stress of the world's awful pressure it will break again, as once it broke. It will give way under our feet. Calvary cannot be the last word for suffering humanity. It cannot of itself, as the ultimate manifestation, create a Gospel. It never did. And whenever we fling ourselves

upon the Cross as our sufficient consummation—whenever we declare with St. Paul that we preach but one thing, "Christ Crucified," we must mean what he certainly did. We must mean (that is) that we have brought already into our presentment of the Cross the full force of the Risen Christ; have with him but one desire—"to know, through the Cross and Passion, Jesus Christ and the power of His Resurrection," praying to God that of His great mercy we too may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.

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